The Magazine for Golden Age, Silver Age & Bronze Age Collectors

COMIC BOOK MARKETPLACE

No. 67
March 1999

JOHN ROMITA

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GWEN STACY Murder Case

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An Open Letter To My Fellow Collectors

Hello, my name is Craig Rader, and welcome to my Spring Catalog. I am glad to have this opportunity to introduce myself and some of my interests. For the better part of ten years, since early summer of 1989, I have been a private collector of Silver and post - Silver Age comic books. On a much smaller scale (both in size and pocket money), I also collected avidly as a kid in the mid to late sixties and early seventies here in Houston, Texas.

My keen interest and area of specialization has been that of grading and evaluating comic book condition. I am the author of The Private Collector's Manual For Grading Comic Books © 1996, which I'm basically "self-publishing". This 26 page book contains comprehensive, detailed descriptions of the traditional grade categories as well as those so-called in-between or combination grades such as Fine/Very Fine and Very Fine/Near Mint. Particularly if you are currently considering an order from my catalog, you may well want to call or send for a copy of my Manual so as to familiarize yourself with how I go about the process of grading comics. The Manual is available directly from me ($8.00 + $3.00 shipping cost) and has also been available through Bedrock City Comic Company (Houston). The catalog is $5.00 postage, but this amount may be subsequently applied against your first order.

I shall be glad to speak with you further on the phone about any concerns or questions you might have about my Catalog, or just grading in general (713)666-8449. First and foremost, I identify myself as a private collector and I really enjoy "talking it up" about comics, even if you aren't currently considering a purchase from my Catalog at this time. Also, WANT LISTS are welcome. You might be interested to know that, in my previous mail order sales to collectors, I have never once had a book returned to me due to overgrading. One time, a comic package was damaged in transit by U.P.S., and thus rejected by my customer. However, that's not the same thing as a return for overgrading. Some of you longer-term collectors might possibly remember my previous full page ads in the old, original series run of Comic Book Marketplace circa 1992, in which I often gave detailed grade descriptions of books for sale. (See CBM #66, page 16.) My critical review/comments on grade and price structures for old comic books have been published in CBM. I am currently writing similar ads, which can be found in Comic Book Marketplace. I can also provide many professional and character References, if you would like to inquire about this.

All of the books in my Catalog were graded individually and with care by myself, in the context of my activities as a private collector. I have never assigned a grade of Near Mint to any Silver Age book in my own personal collection. This is partly due to my strict grading, but also due to the fact that I, admittedly, just haven't seen a large enough quantity of comics over time like some of the long-term pros in our hobby. I've viewed a lot of comics as a collector, but my range would probably be considered relatively small compared to dealer veterans. In some ways that's a plus for me but in other ways a minus. Anyway, I do the best I can and feel confident that I can give you customer satisfaction, primarily due to my emphasis on grading but also because I will take the time to deal with you in a personalized fashion. Thank-you for your interest in my Catalog.

Sincerely,

Craig R. Rader

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ON THE COVER Spidey and a gallery of some of his most important characters. Special thanks to long-time CBM supporter and graphic artist extraordinaire Arnie Sawyer for developing this month's cover.

SPIDER-MAN © 1999 MEG

Grading the CGC

Recently, there's been a flurry of rumors about the upcoming entry of a national coin grading service into the comic collecting hobby. There has also been a fair amount of criticism about possible changes to the present Overstreet numerical grading system; whether the new grading service will use the new modified system, and the possible impact of the changes on dealers, collectors, and the hobby as whole (see last month's Marketplace Mail and this month's CBM Forum).

In light of all this, I felt that it would be appropriate to cut through the hearsay and go directly to the source, thus the preemption of my regular Letter From The Editor space in this issue. What follows is a brief interview with four members of the Comics Guaranty Corporation... John Maben (CGC President), Dave Stump (CGC Vice President), Ed Cardona (Operations Manager), and Steve Borock (Primary Grader).

I would also like to say that CGC has indicated their willingness to continue this interview in *CBM* #68. Already, a goodly number of questions have arrived via e-mail and will be included next time. If you have any questions you'd like included, e-mail or write straight away and I will endeavor to include any and all inquiries from *CBM* readers. Don't wait... write today! Best, Gary

CARTER: *I've received hundreds of calls and letters since the word first got out about your new grading and slabbing service... so forgive me if my questions are rather direct and to the point. Of the more than 100 collectors I spoke with, most voiced concerns that your new service has been behind an effort to water down existing and accepted grading standards... primarily to benefit dealers by increasing the number of books in their stock that could be labeled "high grade." Perhaps you could address those concerns for* CBM *readers.*

MABEN: We think it's unfair to assume that the change from a 100-point grading scale to a 10-point grading scale is somehow equal to "watering down" existing standards. We believe that the vast majority of collectors and dealers will find little or no difference in the actual grades of the books that we certify when comparing the old system to the new. That's because the nomenclature is a common language between both scales, with the exception of split grades which are already in use and accepted by many. We're not quite sure how a new standardized grading system could benefit any one group more than another when being applied by an impartial third party for use by everyone who chooses to use it.

CARTER: *As you know there is presently a big controversy about "split" or "combination" grades. Case in point... the system just published in an ad in* CBG *added combination grades and suggested that they be made part of the standardized nomenclature grading system. Could you discuss your official stand on the use of combination grades and if you are planning to use them.*

MABEN: From our vantage, the "controversy" surrounding split grades seems to exist among a relatively small number of interested parties. The majority of collectors and dealers that we have spoken with thus far are not in any way opposed to the use of split grades so long as they correspond to a particular number and are applied universally to all that embrace the system. "VF" books will still be "VF" as will an "NM" remain an "NM." The use of "VF/NM" will only act to provide a more precise description of a particular comic. CGC does plan to include the use of split grades in the 1-10 standardized grading scale that we intend to use. *(Continued on page 58)*

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NEW AQUISITIONS

RIVER CITY COLLECTION

AIR FIGHTERS	4		VF+	$800
ALL AMERICAN MEN OF WAR	9		VF-	$200
	11		VF	$225
	43		VF+	$125
ADVS. INTO THE UNKNOWN	47		VF-	$95
	49		FINE	$40
AMERICAN AIR FORCES	5		VF-	$30
ARROWHEAD	2	ATLAS	VG	$25
BLACK MAGIC	V6#4		FVF	$45
BUCK ROGERS	5	STUNNING	VF++	$800
BATTLE ACTION	21		VF-	$35
BRAVE & BOLD	3		FVF	$300
COMBAT CASEY	32	VF+ W/CHIP OUT	VG	$15
CLASSICS ILLUSTRATED	6	TALE OF TWO CITIES/1ST	VF/NM	$1400
	22	THE PATHFINDER/1B	VF/NM	$300
	35	LAST DAYS OF POMPEII/1ST	VF/NM	$300
	75	LADY OF THE LAKE/HRN 85	VF/NM	$35
WESTERN ROUND UP	4	DELL GIANT	VF	$65
DARK SHADOWS	22		VF/NM	$40
	32		VF+	$35
FROTIER FIGHTERS	7	SCARCE DC	VF+	$300
FAWCETT MOVIE COMICS	17	ROSE OF CIMMERON	VF	$50
FIREHAIR	8		VF	$125
FAMOUS AUTHORS	10	ROMEO & JULIET	VF-	$100
FIGHTIN' ARMY	20	DITKO ART	VF	$30
FOUR COLOR	10	BUCK ROGERS	VF++	$900
	61	SANTA CLAUS FUNNIES	VG-	$35
	373	SGT PRESTON	VF/NM	$75
	614	20,000 LEAGUES	VF/NM	$125
	657	BEN BOWIE	VF+	$30
	709	SEARCHERS/JOHN WAYNE	FINE	$85
	737	STEVE CANYON	VF	$50
	738	FESS PARKER COVER	VF+	$75
	739	LUKE SHORT	VF/NM	$35
	924	COLT .45	VF+	$95
	925	LAST OF THE FAST GUNS	VF/NM	$75
	929	BRAVE EAGLE	VF/NM	$35
	932	SMOKEY THE BEAR	NM	$75
GHOST	3	VF/NM W/TEAR	VF-	$175
GI COMBAT	44	1ST DC ISSUE/GREYTONE	VF-	$500
	46	CLASSIC COVER	VF+	$150
GUNSMOKE (DELL)	10		NM-	$75
GUNSMOKE (GK)	2		VF+	$25
HAUNT OF FEAR	8		VF/NM	$350
	20		FVF	$125
INDIANS	16	FICTION HOUSE	VF-	$50
INDIAN CHIEF	6		NM-	$25
	10		NM-	$25
	10		NM-	$25
	24		NM-	$15
JUMBO	108		VF	$75
KID SLADE	6	ATLAS/AWESOME BLACK COVER	VF+	$45
LEADING	8		FINE	$225
LEGENDS OF DANIEL BOONE	3	SCARCE DC	VF	$250
LONGBOW	3		VF+	$45
MAD	9	BEAUTIFUL	VF++	$500
	13		FVF	$225
	18	VF+ W/WAVE	VF-	$125
	25	2ND MAGAZINE FORMAT	VF+	$350
MASTER	34	RABOY COVER	VG	$125
MD	5		VF	$50
MARVEL TALES	100	KILLER	NM-	$750
	103		VF/NM	$650
	103	VF/NM W/SMALL CHIP	VF-	$350
	109		FVF	$200
	111		VF/NM	$400
	126		VF+	$250
	142		VF+	$150
MISS FURY	4	HITLER COVER	VG	$175
MR DISTRICT ATTORNEY	39		VF-	$75
	44		VF/NM	$75
MOTION PICTURE COMICS	113		FINE+	$40
MYSTIC	44		VF+	$125
NAVY ACTION	3	VF/NM W/WAVE	VF	$40
NIGHTMARE	3		FVF	$150
OUR ARMY AT WAR	6		VF+	$350
	45		VF+	$150
OUR FIGHTING FORCES	18		VF-	$100
	19		FVF	$75
OUT OF THIS WORLD	3	FANTASTIC DITKO COVER	FINE+	$100
PANIC	7		VF	$50
	12		FINE+	$50
	12		FINE-	$35
PLANET	2	CENTERFOLD DETACHED	VG/F	$900
	25		FINE	$350
	70	SCARCE	VF/VF+	$350
	71	SCARCE	VF-	$250
RIOT	4	VF+ W/TEAR	FVF	$100
RACE FOR THE MOON	1		VF-	$50
REAL LIFE	58		VF	$50
RED WARRIOR	5	ATLAS	VF-	$45
SGT PRESTON	7		NM-	$50
STAR SPANGLED	105		VF+	$225
	123		VF+	$250
STAR SPANGLED WAR STORIES	50		VF+	$125
	52	CLASSIC COVER	VF+	$125
STAR TREK	7		FVF	$65
	9		VF/NM	$150
	22		VF+	$50
STRAIGHT ARROW	53		VF+	$30
SUPER MAGICIAN	V2#9		VG	$25
TALES FROM THE CRYPT	31		VF/NM	$400
3D HOUSE OF TERROR			VF+	$200
THIS MAGAZINE IS HAUNTED	12		FINE	$50
TOM CORBETT	11	NM W/WAVE	VF-	$50
TWO FISTED TALES	36		FINE+	$40
TOMAHAWK	10		FINE	$75
	13		FINE	$50
TUROK	4		VF+	$175
UNCANNY TALES	39		VF/NM	$125
UNUSUAL TALES	7	DITKO	FVF	$75
VAULT OF HORROR	18		VF/NM	$350
WAR	4		VF-/VF	$60
	8		FVF	$50
	10		VF	$65
	47		VF-	$40
WAR BATTLES	1		FVF	$40
WEB OF EVIL	2		VF-	$200
WINGS	122		VF-	$90
KING OF THE ROYAL MOUNTED	13	GREAT COVER	NM	$50
	14	GREAT COVER	NM	$50

HIGH GRADE SETS

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MAGNUS,ROBOT FIGHTER	#1VF/NM, 2-22(MASS. COPIES)NM		$1800
SPACE FAMILY ROBINSON	#1VF+, 2-19 AVG.NM- MOHAWK VALLEY COPIES, 20,21,23,25-30	AVG. NM	$1800
FLASH GORDON(KING)	1-6,8-11 ALL MASS. COPIES	NM	$350
THE SPECTRE	1 NM, 2-10NM OAKLAND COPIES		$1200
ADVENTURE	431-437	AVG.NM	$200
ROCKY AND HIS FRIENDS	FC 1128,1152,1166,1208,1275 & 1311 ALL DELL FILE COPIES	NM	$1650
BULL WINKLE AND ROCKY	FC 1270, 01-090-209, #1 & 2 ALL FILE COPIES	NM	$600
BEEP BEEP,THE ROAD RUNNER	FC 1008,#4-13,GK 3,4 (ALL FILE COPIES)	NM	$500
DEMON(KIRBY DC)	1-16	VF+	$100
NEW GODS (KIRBY DC)	1-11	VF+	$200
MISTER MIRACLE (KIRBY DC)	1-18	VF+	$250
	3-18	VF+	$165
WALLY WOOD TOWER	DYNAMO 1-4 VF, NOMAN 1& 2, THUNDER AGENTS 1-10	AVG.VF+	$750
LI'L ABNER	63-69	VF/NM	$750
LONE RANGER	37,41-44,46,48,52,58,60,61,65,69,70 (14 TOTAL) ALL FILE COPIES	VF/NM	$750
CREEPY	1-14	VF/NM	$400
SPARKY WATTS(BOOTY ROGERS)	BIG SHOT 77-104,SPARKY WATTS 5,6,7,9, BATS 2,3, DUDLEY 2	AVG. VG	$300
DAREDEVIL(MARVEL)	25-30,32-35,37,39,40(2),41, 47-49 (18 TOTAL)	AVG.NM-	$500
MELVIN THE MONSTER	1-9	AVG.NM-	$750
BABE	1-11	AVG.FINE	$300
BRAVE & BOLD	45-49 STRANGE SPORTS	AVG.VF-	$250
NICK FURY	1-7 STERANKO COVERS	AVG.NM	$500
X-MEN	49-51 OAKLAND COPIES	AVG.NM	$500

Greeeting..

Since my last ad I've been fortunate enough to have aquired some new collections.The majority of these items are being offered for the first time.

The **River City Collection** was introduced by Brian Peets at Wonder Con last year.It had a tremendous reception,many of the books selling at multiples of guide.I was able to locate the source of these books and purchase the remainder of the original collection.

The second collection I purchased was from a lifelong collector.He specialized in high grade material.The sets portion of this add is a sampling of that aquisition. I've also released some of my personal holdings (the down side of buying collections is paying for them).

Have fun.There are some great books here.Please also remember me when you have things to sell as well.

Thanks,

Ed Jaster

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EDITOR'S NOTE: *The following letter from Mike Ward should have been included in this month's CBM Forum... but was placed here instead because of limited space.*

Reply to Craig Rader's editorial

This reply is in response to Craig Rader's emotionally charged editorial in CBM #66. Let me preface my comments on the fact that I have been collecting comics and vinyl LPs (among other things) since the early '70s. I have also lived in the Houston area on and off for seven years.

My overall impression of the editorial is that it smacks of sour grapes. I have no argument for the first four paragraphs (other than the Goldmine Record Price Guides are horrible—but that's another issue.) The part of his editorial that I take exception to is his emotional/ financial arguments about devaluation of comic values.

Firstly, Craig gripes about how many Silver Age titles have either lost or have not increased in value based on the Overstreet Guide. My reply to this is "So what?" Where is it carved in stone that prices of collectibles HAVE to increase in value every year, or for that matter, maintain current value? I collected stamps in the '70s when it was very popular. Now the hobby is all but dead. Prices have dropped significantly across the board since that period. Look at the "Modern Age" comics market. How many times have we seen a comic go from $10 to $100 and vice versa in the span of a few months? I realized that Mr. Rader was addressing long term valuation but he obviously wasn't collecting comics in the '70s when Disney, Lev Gleason, and Crackajack Funnies were, at times, sizzling. Should the value of these comics rise regardless of the demand for them now?

Anyone with a superficial grasp of economic theory should be able to understand supply and demand. If no one wants a Daredevil #7 in VF+ for $250, then why should the price go up? Hell, if a half dozen people are willing to pay $250 for it but no more, should the price go up then? What if, on average, the book was traded for $230 two years previous and $220 last year; should the price rise be based on this contradictory trend? If ONE person is willing to pay $500 for it but everyone else only $200, is it magically worth $500 now? "Feelings" about how the comic market SHOULD react is irrelevant to the actual marketplace.

Mr. Rader goes on an emotional sandbagging trip about WHY Daredevil SHOULD be valued higher—because of quality of the art, age, and significance of the run, etc., etc. Using his logic one could only come to the conclusion that ECs are the most valuable and collectible comics ever printed! And anyone who collects Golden Age/Atom Age comics knows that this just isn't true. To borrow one of Mr. Rader's phrases, "Let me just propose" that Weird Science Fantasy #29 be just as valuable as Famous Funnies #209-216. Is this a true statement regardless of my personal justification? No. SHOULD WSF #29 be as valuable because I and a group of my collecting buddies think it should be? Again the answer is no.

I could go on a big (baseless) tirade on how could any Silver Age comic possibly be worth more than any Golden Age book but I'm sure most of the CBM readership get my point.

Secondly, to address his point of "steady, stable growth" in the Price Guide, I suggest this is purely fantasy. If he wants a 5% rise, for example, every year, then why have an annual Guide? Just add 5% multiplied by the number of years past your present Guide (compounded, of course) and voila! no more need for a Price Guide. Since Mr. Rader likes to quote "experts" in the field, I would like him to reference his source for "the economic concept of steady, stable growth." Again, a fantasy land (unless you're Alan Greenspan and have the power to micromanage the country's economy.)

I don't know what the consensus is out there in Fandomland, but I want the annual Guide to ACCURATELY reflect the previous year's AVERAGE documented values. It sounds like Mr. Rader wants a guaranteed return on his investment. I could care less how much a particular book was worth 10 years ago because that point is moot (except for historical documentation purposes.) I WOULD like an accurate portrayal of the previous year's purchase values on which to base buying and selling. If a "chop job" ACCURATELY reflects the previous year's market

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then that's the information I want.

(Now, as far as DOES the Guide ACCURATELY report market prices—this is something that could be discussed till hell freezes over and is not the point of my rebuttal.)

Mr. Rader's arguments about what spread "Fine" condition books should fall into is again dependent on market supply and demand. If a 1:3:10 spread is an accurate ratio for "Fine" books then so be it. Just because I think that it SHOULD be 1:5:10 doesn't make it so. Now, if this is because true "Fine" books are hard to find or that no one knows how to grade "Fine" books, then that is an altogether a different matter, which, again is beyond the scope of this reply.

In conclusion, it's obvious that Mr. Rader's Silver Age collection has taken quite a "hit" in the last few years based on "Guide" values. It's too bad he sees his books more as an investment than the intrinsic entertainment/nostalgia values the books have. I INVEST my money in index funds and stocks. I COLLECT comics for the enjoyment, therefore comic market fluctuations are meaningless to me (if I can't afford something now, it's doubtful I'll be able to afford that same item later. But maybe I can convince Bob Overstreet to do a "chop job" on Action #1.)

In conclusion, just because you personally FEEL that something SHOULD be a certain way doesn't mean that is how things are or will be.

Mike Ward, via E-mail

Editor Emeritus clarifies

Noticed in CBM #66 (page 28) a graphic was not captioned and might be construed as a Kelly Freas self-portrait, when in fact, it was sci-fi writer, L. Sprague de Camp painted by Freas.

Julie Schwartz, New York

Arnold Drake writes...

A series of short-term interruptions (Chanukah, Christmas, New Year and the "im-lynch-ment" of Clinton) delayed my letter in response to that great Doom Patrol piece you recently published. Doug Kelly has told it pretty much the way it happened. He also covered some of the Deadman story. About that, let me add the following.

In the first two Deadman stories I laid down the central proposition: a man is murdered and then supernaturally empowered to inhabit any living person as a tool to uncover his murderer. But the saga as I saw it was far more than just an interesting switch on The Fugitive. Because what I had in mind was Deadman's existence on two levels: his life on earth in those many guises; his existence in the "other world." And that second story line would have been as important as the first.

Arriving in the other world, Boston Brand finds it run by the same rivalries, jealousies and political maneuverings as riddle our Earth. A starchy type, "The Bookkeeper" (also called "BK") doles out assignments and "working" conditions. BK is not empowered to judge others, only to enforce judgments already made. BK "knows" that those who make the judgments are far too generous. He sees their leniency as an open door to all the evils of "World-I" (Earth). To BK, accepting Boston Brand with his checkered past life is a prime example of such a grave misjudgment. (Cheap pun intended.)

And so BK, while obeying orders to grant Deadman the assignments he needs, secretly dedicates himself and his cohorts (called "AKs" or "Angel Kissers") to removing him. (Always, of course, for the good of humanity, living and dead.) Boston quickly finds that any Earth-I role he plays holds the known hazards of that job plus whatever BK and his clique can craftily throw at him. Boston fights a constant two-front war.

That was the way I saw Deadman developing. Not a study in comparative religions, you understand. In fact, BK's deadly political maneuverings would only add more action to the story. When I conceived of Deadman, many of the young people were caught up in all sorts of investigations of the unknown. Thirty-three years later, I wonder if teenagers would tear themselves away from the internet long enough to read about such stuff as dreams are made of.

Thanks for the copies of the Doom Patrol issue you sent. See you in San Diego in August.

Arnold Drake, New York

The collector must judge

For this collector of pre-Code crime books, CBM #65 was much anticipated and did not disappoint. The "Thing" cover gallery and the expanded market report were icing on the cake. Michael Naiman's MarketWatch report served to confirm my belief that the OPG is less the pricing 'bible' it once was, the values therein more an approximation of the price one might expect to pay for a given book in a certain grade. It is up to the experience of the collector to decide

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whether that approximation is high, low, or accurate, (or in the case of some scarce, high demand books, whether the FN or NM price is more accurate for a low grade copy.)

Still, I was surprised at how few books listed in CBM MarketWatch report sold for within 90% to 110% of their Guide value. This trend would seem to make complaints about lack of listed grades on convention books less relevant. The collector must judge eye appeal, structural grade, price, and relative scarcity before deciding whether to pay the asking price or walk away if the dealer doesn't bring down the price on a given book. This might be a little troublesome for the new collector, but who among us hasn't paid full Guide for a book we later see substantially discounted, or passed on another book priced at 1.5x Guide only to realize later that we'll be lucky to find another copy at twice the price.

Cliff Wiener & Ken Danker are as likely as anyone to know what the ten most sought after pre-Code crime books are, and their list compels me to throw in my own observations about collectible pre-Code comics.

If the cover isn't demented enough for you, inside Fight Against Crime #20 is the story "Double Trouble" with not one, but two intensely graphic panels of first a man and later a woman getting their heads crushed by a car. Perfect Crime #28 may not be pictured in Gerber, but the 27th Overstreet has a nice color reproduction of the cover, and the 28th a black & white one. Personally, I think the strangulation cover on Perfect Crime #30 is the best of the run, and probably easier to find.

Other great covers of the genre would include: Law-Crime #1 with an unforgettable L.B. Cole electric chair cover and interior art... this book is pretty easy to find at around Guide.

Crime Mysteries #15 has a great acid-in-the-face cover with the victim about to kill his wife for disfiguring him, while her lover runs away, ignoring her pleas for help. Too bad there's no story to match, although the story "Skin Deep" does contain a couple of gory panels of a man's flesh being ripped from his face. You'll probably pay more than Guide for this one, but it doesn't seem that hard to find.

Crimes by Women #6 has a classic girl fight cover, which more than compensates for the less than memorable interior. A tough book to find.

Crime SuspenStories #22 of the infamous decapitation cover. Being an EC, this book is a lot easier to find than Fight Against Crime #20, and there's always the reprint.

Wanted #50-52 to make up a nice three issue run that's pretty affordable. #50 has an outstanding pink, green and white surrealistic cover by John Buscema. John also does the bludgeoning cover to #51, which includes the classic story "Holiday of Horror," an excellent marijuana-leads-to-murder story, and superior to "Satan's Cigarettes" in #18. The cover story to #52, "Cult of Killer's" is another classic, and a much better read than the similar "Religious Murder Cult" story in the more expensive Police Line-up #2. At Guide all three books together would run about $50, but issue #50 may cost that alone.

Richard Byard, California

Thank you, Steve Jacobs

Hope you and yours had a wonderful Christmas. I sure did and it was compounded by getting my issue of CBM #65 at my local comic book specialty shop (Excalibur Books & Comics). What a fantastic issue! I don't see how you can do any better. Without picking out favorites, all the main features on a scale of one to ten, are a solid ten in my book! All those color covers are fantastic. In the letters section, thank you, Steve Jacobs for getting Gary to explain the two series of Comic Book Monthly and Comic Book Marketplace. At last! I wish we had more Golden Age articles by Stephen Gentner. All the best.

Norral Johnson, Oregon

Yes sir, I do

My thanks to Nicky Wright for his outstanding "Seducers of the Innocent" in CBM #65. Obviously influenced by the true detective magazines of the day, Lev Gleason, Charles Biro and Bob Wood pioneered a sensational new genre of comics with Crime Does Not Pay in 1942. For five years the title ruled the crime roost in the world of comics before imitators and competitors finally materialized.

Enter William M. Gaines with what Wright terms "a crime comic to end all crime comics, Crime SuspenStories." While EC did not invent crime or horror comics, the company undoubtedly produced the finest crime and horror books of the pre-Code era. With an unparalleled stable of incredible artists, EC expanded the limits of the field to new levels of creativity and controversy.

Wright refers to Johnny Craig's infamous cover art for Crime SuspenStories #22. This issue had the "severed head" cover which became the subject of a bizarre verbal exchange between

William M. Gaines and committee members during the Senate Hearings on Juvenile Delinquency in 1954. When asked if he thought the cover of Crime SuspenStories #22 was in good taste, Gaines replied: "Yes sir, I do, for the cover of a horror comic. A cover in bad taste, for example, might be defined as holding the head a little higher so that the neck could be seen dripping blood from it, and moving the body over a little further so that the neck of the body could be seen to be bloody."

Needless to say, the stodgy senators were not enamored with Gaines. Nevertheless, Johnny Craig was a great artist who rendered numerous lurid covers and remarkable stories for EC's Crime SuspenStories.

CBM #64 included an interview with Bill Schelly, as well as Mark Burbey's "Fantastic Fanzines!" I very much enjoyed these features, and hope to see more on the history of fandom and fanzines in future issues.

Timothy M. Walters, Oklahoma

Boring's trademark

Just a late note on your wonderful Superman issue (CBM #63). I couldn't have been more delighted to have finally read an article on Wayne Boring. I grew up reading Boring's Superman and, frankly, I miss his work. Thank you, Lynn Woolley for the remembrance of a great Superman artist who (alone?) spans the Golden and Silver Ages.

Boring had a distinctive energetic style. His figures popped off the page at you. While he wasn't the greatest master of human anatomy, his Superman was magnificent. As Lynn Woolley points out, he was tall, muscular and overpowering to his enemies. He projected infinite strength and could do anything.

The salient aspect of Boring's art was its power, excitement, and urgency. While other artists may have drawn emotional expressions more accurately, Boring dramatized them better. There was a great physicality to his characters' emotional life. You could see them responding to the events around them—usually with a kind of dismayed consternation. Their inner conflicts were reflected in the tension Boring created in every panel. It was hard to remain calm while reading a Wayne Boring story. Every page surged with action and suspense.

When Boring left, a different tone took over Superman, and for that matter, most other DC titles. Others may have brought greater sophistication, elegance, or social realism to the superhero story, but the blunt impact, the exhilarating motion, the physical dynamism of Boring's work wasn't equaled until Jack Kirby's renaissance at Marvel in the early '60s.

No fan will ever confuse another artist with Wayne Boring. His style is so distinctive, so unique, the merest glance at his work is enough to tip off a discerning reader.

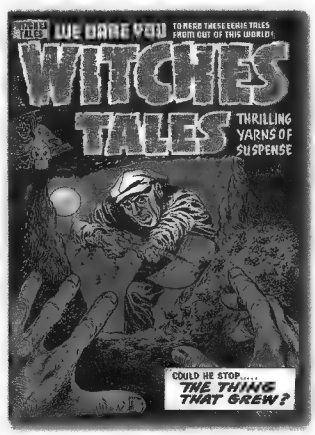
If that weren't enough, there is one thing that will always identify a Boring Superman story. An example appears on page 45 in the upper right. Surprisingly, no other artist seems to have copied this, Boring's trademark figure: the image of Superman flying towards the reader in a running position, rather than in the more conventional "diving" posture.

So thanks again, CBM and Lynn Woolley, for the long overdue recognition of one of my favorite artists. Keep up the good work.

Collin Alscher, California

Consider me flabbergasted!

Dear Most Esteemed Editor, Fellow Panelpictographicalogist and All-Around Swell Guy Mr. Carter... I really enjoyed your issue featuring pre-Code crime comics (CBM #65). Although I'm not a big fan of these books, your writers have a way of tackling any subject and making it fun and interesting.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TO READ THESE EERIE TALES FROM OUT OF THIS WORLD!
WITCHES TALES
THRILLING YARNS OF SUSPENSE
COULD HE STOP.... THE THING THAT GREW?

However, I have a couple of points I would like to bring up. First, in Jeff Gelb's otherwise great article ("World of Glass") I found a statement he made that cries out for correction. He states that Kirby's fondness for tough guy stories was due to his Hell's Kitchen background. As you know, I grew up there and I know Jack Kirby did not come from there. I can't remember whether he came from the lower East Side of Manhattan or the Bronx or Brooklyn, but definitely not Hell's Kitchen. Also, Will Murray's Batman article stated that Batman faced "extinction" in 1964. I can't help it, I'm skeptical of that assertion.

And while we're on the topic of Will Murray, what's the big idea? Will Murray's article "The Riddle of Batman & Raven" in CBM #66 rocked me to my comic lovin' core! Consider me flabbergasted! I thought I had reached a cynical point in life where nothing could surprise me anymore and instead he succeeds in knocking my complacent butt to the floor! Will has presented us with a challenging mystery that even the Darknight Detective himself might not be able to solve... AND presented the story in a logical and riveting way and yet lets you come to your own conclusion. I mean I can picture Bruce Wayne in that costume! Somehow, some way, there has to be somebody who is still alive and can substantiate these fantastic claims. Amazing coincidence or is truth indeed stranger than fiction?

I also loved the Superman collectibles article by Jim Hambrick of the Super Museum. I only live a few hours away from Metropolis and I would like to attend the Superman celebration in June. Is there any way I can get information about the event as well as lodging, etc.?

Am I being overly suspicious or were your "Market Reports" geared towards internet buyers? I came away feeling left out of the loop because I don't have a computer. If the future of comics commerce is going to be on-line then I'm really going to be left behind. Is this why I'm seeing less and less dealers ads each week in the CBG?

Once again an outstanding issue and I'll be looking forward to your Batman anniversary issue.

Eric G. Blackmore, Tennessee

Yeech! Get a manicure!

While attending a recent collectibles show, my daughter and I made a discovery that will be of great interest to CBM readers!

We were rummaging through a couple of boxes of "original art"—mostly cut and paste Xeroxed Sad Sack covers and strip art from strips I'd never heard of. The Sad Sack and other Harvey paste-ups were interesting, but not my kind of thing to collect.

Then my daughter found a manila envelope that said "Witches Tales Stats" on the tab. My heart skipped a couple of beats as we started looking through the folder! It was full of splash pages and covers (printed in negative, as they are photographic stats)—beautiful white on black! We also found some Xerox copies of various Witches Tales covers. One of these faded cover copies proved to be very interesting!

We found the cover to Witches Tales #27 (October 1954)—but it *(Continued on page 76)*

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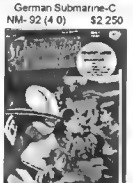

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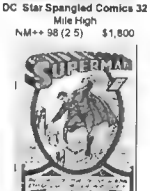

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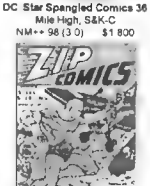

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Still Fresh at 50!

By Pat S. Calhoun

Fifty years ago—in early 1949—the post-War comic book boom was well underway. Crime, western, and romance books were luring a large audience of adults to complement the huge youth readership. Old established titles put on new faces as sales climbed towards the early 1950's peak of over a billion comics per year. Thirty cents (plus a few pennies tax) plunked down at the drug store could have bought these three comics to serve as examples of the different kinds of anthologies: the hero title with back-up features, genre short story collections, and the classic "mixed bag" that grouped heroes, humor, adventure, and what-not in one mag.

The anthology approach had originally taken hold in the 68-page pre-Golden Age and early Golden Age books and still made sense in the 52-pagers of 1949. But the dropping to 36 pages in the 1950s phased out many anthologies—save for genre short story books. So here they are in all their four-color glory, from one of the great eras of comic book history.

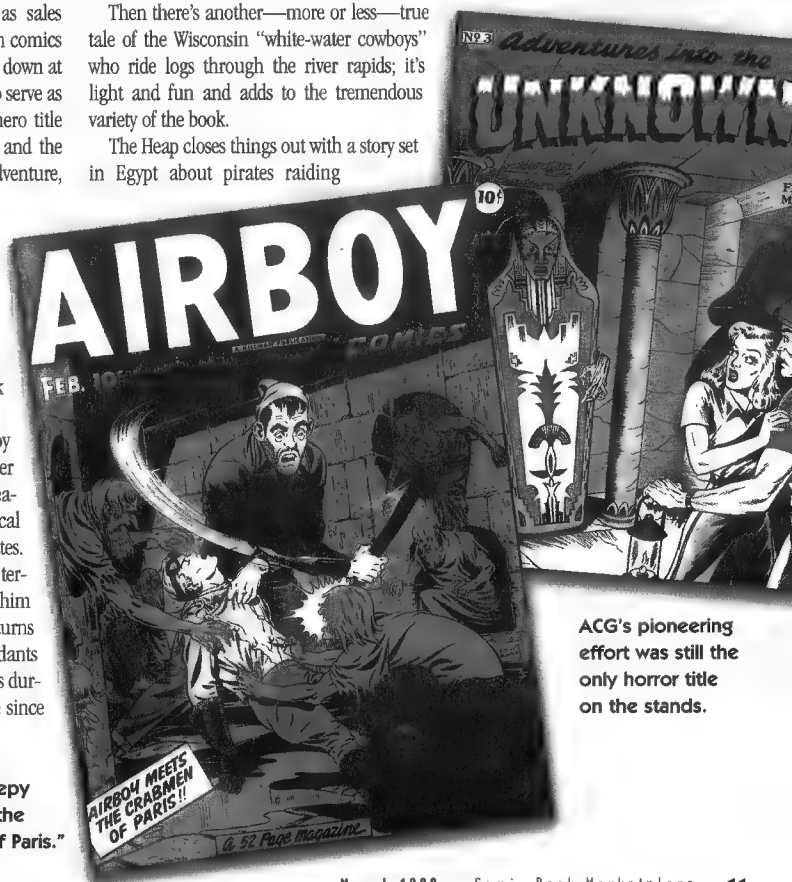
Airboy had always been an outstanding title, and by #60 (February 1959) Hillman was making it even better by keeping only Airboy and the Heap as continuing features and filling the book with a host of biographical sketches and strange and fascinating historical vignettes. This issue's Airboy novella, "The Crabmen of Paris," is terrific—as an old friend calls Airboy to France to help him figure out why 35 people have recently disappeared. It turns out they are being abducted by Crabmen—the descendants of a branch of the royal family that fled into the sewers during the Revolution to escape the guillotine and have since devolved into subhumans still hungry for vengeance.

Next up is one of the last installments of an old aviation strip, "The Flying Fool." It's an engaging yarn of hidden gold and battling elephants in remote China, with superb art by Leonard Starr.

After that comes a biography of the pirate Jean Lafitte, focusing on how he fought with the Americans at the Battle of New Orleans in 1815. Never have comic books made history more enthralling than in the pages of *Airboy*!

Then there's another—more or less—true tale of the Wisconsin "white-water cowboys" who ride logs through the river rapids; it's light and fun and adds to the tremendous variety of the book.

The Heap closes things out with a story set in Egypt about pirates raiding



Dan Zolnerowich drew a compelling and creepy cover for Airboy #60 (Feb 1949) illustrating the classic novella "Airboy Meets the Crabmen of Paris."

The eerie and effective cover seen on Adv. Into the Unknown #3 (Feb/Mar 1949) shows how fast the genre was developing.

ACG's pioneering effort was still the only horror title on the stands.

ships near the mouth of the Nile. When a British-educated son returns home the people of his province treat him as an outcast, so the Heap befriends him and helps him defeat the pirates who have raided his father's ships. This is a so-so episode of an incredible strip but still makes a worthwhile finish to a solid issue.

Exciting #66 (Mar 1949) features a triumphant Alex Schomburg cover that is his last and most imaginative Judy of the Jungle image.

In late 1948 the American Comics Group (ACG) launched the horror genre with *Adventures Into The Unknown*. There had been supernatural books and strips before, but this was the first ongoing title to devote itself to weird tales. Issue #3 (February/March) came out in early 1949, ready to colorfully compete for the reader's dime with an awesome mummy (case!) cover that instantly marked the mag as an anthology of spooky stories.

This issue's contents show how young the genre was; the stories have all the familiar ACG themes and elements—witches, vampires, and ghosts —but in a crude form that would keep developing… till three years later fantasy would rule the newsstands, with *Adventures Into the Unknown* and its kid sister *Forbidden Worlds* among the cream of the monthly macabre crop.

"The Witch Cat of Salem" starts things off with a tale that begins back in 17th-century Massachusetts, where a witch—about to be burned at the stake—wants a "familiar" to live on for her, wreaking evil. She pricks her finger with a needle and recites: "Ghosts and witches from the past; Hearken to the spell I cast!; From my drop of blood create; A beast of ever-living hate!"

And so is born the witch cat that haunts her house for hundreds of years until a young present-day couple moves in and seems doomed until they get help from the ghost of the 17th-century witch-hunter who had killed the witch and vowed to fight any of her magic that lived thereafter. Sound "familiar"? you bet! The amazing thing was how much mileage ACG writer/editor Richard Hughes got out of his basic plots.

The second story is a totally traditional vampire tale, and it's followed by another haunted house story. Both stories show that when they fight magic with magic—although it's logical—it often lessens the drama of the conflict.

After a couple of fillers the final yarn is yet another haunted house affair—but done well and elaborate and with stylish art by Al Feldstein. This time the ghost of a two-centuries-dead sorcerer is freed when a historian rebuilds the ruins of the house lightning blasted to kill the malignant mage. The thwarting of the evil ghost comes once again from "supernatural stage left," but it is plausible if predictable.

It's intriguing that Feldstein participated in this early fantasy title, and he no doubt he mentioned it when Bill Gaines and he were contemplating horror at EC later in 1949.

Exciting #66 (March) is proof that, in early 1949, there were still enough readers with catholic tastes—who liked jungle and western and superhero and humor and crime strips—to support such an appealing anthology. The Alex Schomberg cover is his last jungle cover for this title and one of the most fanciful and splendidly realized of the series.

Inside, the "Judy of the Jungle" tale doesn't have her riding a giant bird but is a fast-paced thriller of an insane white woman who as a leopard queen terrorizes the Congo and kidnaps an American family until Judy comes along to take her down.

Galloping in after that is the Mystery Rider, a western costumed hero strip with art by the redoubtable Charles Quinlan—whose old-fashioned style made a memorable contribution to the Golden Age. It's the standard story of a crook stirring up Indian trouble to help him rob a payroll-loaded stagecoach, but it's done to a turn and that wonderful Quinlan art—you know you're reading an old comic when you see that stuff!

This issue's Black Terror tale is drawn by the talented team of Mort Meskin and Jerry Robinson, but the handsome art can't help the sappy story become more than a forgettable page-turner. The superheroes were usually the weakest links in the Better Publications anthologies.

But Roger Dodger comes up next to make things right. Roger needs some dough to take Mabel to a movie so he volunteers to clean the cellar. While down there he accidently unhooks a water pipe and comic chaos is stopped short of tragedy only when the plumber arrives and fixes the flood and Roger's mother gives in and pays him anyway because she can't bear to disrupt young romance.

That leaves Jimmy Dale Secret Agent to wrap things up with an eight-pager of drug smuggling in San Francisco's Chinatown. It's readable, and George Roussos does a good job on the art, but it's four-color fodder. The issue still tallies out on the plus side and that fab Xela cover makes it memorable.

In early 1949 many of the old styles of comics were still strong, even as the new styles were coming in, giving the field an opulent diversity. The passing of fifty years has turned the era into a huge treasure chest from which the patient collector can withdraw gem after priceless gem….

By Michelle Nolan

Stop the Presses!

One of DC's big three "crime" books, *Big Town,* is actually the very first of the company's titles based on a network television show.

What is the most challenging, most difficult long-running series of DC comics to collect from the 1940s or '50s?

What is the only 1947-51 DC title that began on a monthly basis right from the first issue?

Who is the least-remembered character who ever appeared in radio, television, movies and comic books?

Give up?

OK, now you can read all about it. The answer to the first two questions is *Big Town* comics and the character in question may well be Steve Wilson, the battling editor of the Illustrated Press.

In my column on crime comics in *CBM* #66, I wrote briefly about what a "sleeper" title *Big Town* is. Most issues of this series are uncommon, so much so that I could not begin to speculate over which issues are the scarcest. It's truly a collecting challenge!

There probably is no DC title more redolent of its time period than *Big Town*. I'll admit that it probably means more to me than most collectors, because I've been a newspaper reporter for more than 30 years. Even if you aren't into newspapers, however, you can enjoy *Big Town*.

But for those with a love of newspapering, *Big Town* is a treasure. It's a hokey period piece, but it's sheer fun and nowhere near as unrealistic as most newspaper stories in comics.

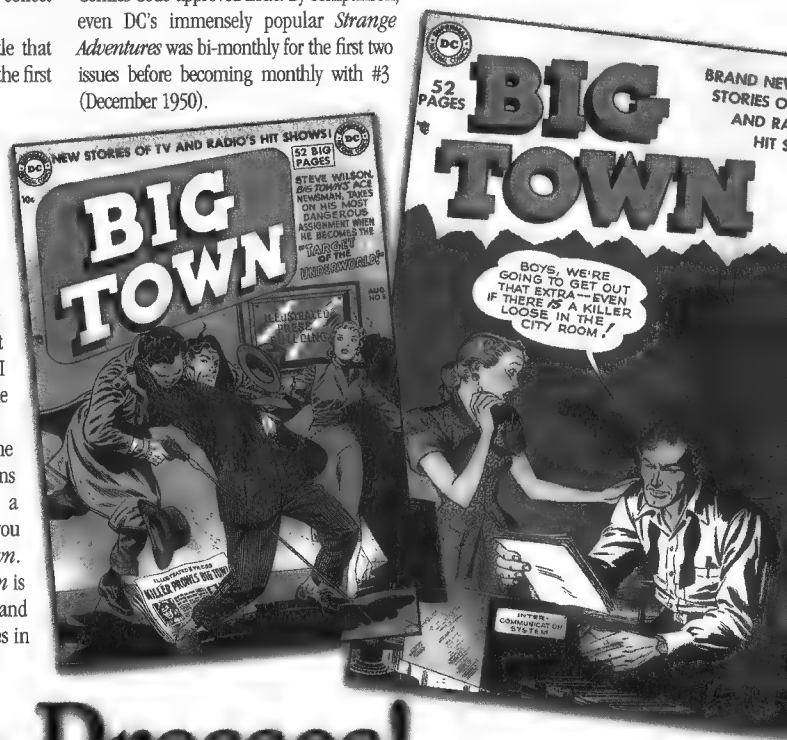
Big Town ran exactly 50 issues, from #1 (January 1951) through #50 (March/April 1958). There were three stories of Steve Wilson's exploits in every issue.

Big Town was the first DC comic based on a television show (DC's five issues of *Ozzie and Harriet* were based on the radio show of the same name and were published more than two years before the debut of the *Ozzie and Harriet* TV show in October 1952). *Big Town* was also one of the few comics ever designed to hit the stands almost concurrently with the debut of a television show. The TV show *Big Town* debuted October 5, 1950, on the CBS Network. Of course, the radio show had been running for 13 years, so the phrase "*Big Town*" was fairly well ingrained in pop culture.

The first 12 issues ran monthly, which was unheard of at the time for a new DC title (and for most other new comics as well), and #13-50 ran bi-monthly, with #32 (March/April 1955) the first Comics Code-approved issue. By comparison, even DC's immensely popular *Strange Adventures* was bi-monthly for the first two issues before becoming monthly with #3 (December 1950).

Big Town #8 (Aug 1951) "52 Big Pages" of "new stories of TV and Radio's hit shows."

Big Town #1 (Jan 1951) presently Guides for $150 in Fine condition.


NEW STORIES OF TV AND RADIO'S HIT SHOWS!
52 BIG PAGES
BIG TOWN
STEVE WILSON, BIG TOWN'S ACE NEWSMAN, TAKES ON HIS MOST DANGEROUS ASSIGNMENT WHEN HE BECOMES THE TARGET OF THE UNDERWORLD!
AUG NO 1
ILLUSTRATED PRESS BUILDING
KILLER PROWLS BIG TOWN
52 PAGES
BIG TOWN
BRAND NEW STORIES O AND RA HIT
BOYS, WE'RE GOING TO GET OUT THAT EXTRA—EVEN IF THERE IS A KILLER LOOSE IN THE CITY ROOM!
INTER-COMMUNICATION SYSTEM

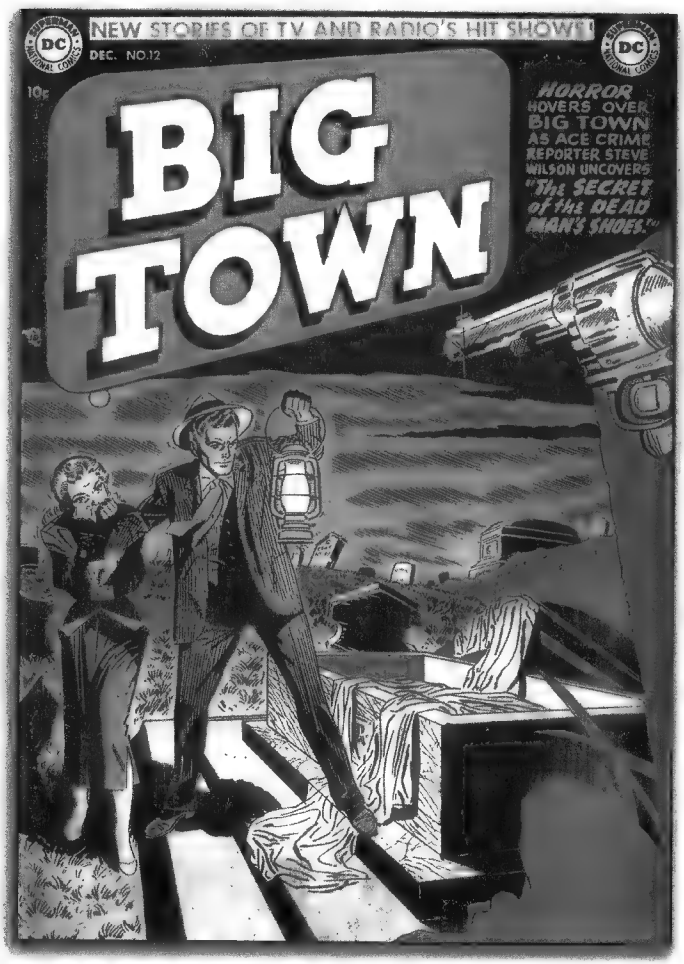
The first nine issues of *Big Town* were 52 pages (counting the covers, just as the publishers did) with three wonderful 10-page Steve Wilson stories (except one story was a 9-page in #9). Issue #10 was an oddity, a 44-page issue (counting the covers) and #11-50 were all 36 pages, with 6-page or 8-page *Big Town* stories.

Big Town, by the way, is a marvelous example of how a complete story can be told in 6-8 pages.

I say #10 was an oddity, because most DC titles went right from 52 pages to either 44 (such as the Superman and Batman family titles) or 36. I've never quite understood why DC cut some of its titles to 44 pages (and left them that way until the middle of 1954) but cut others to 36 pages, when there was never any effort to capitalize on the extra 8 pages.

Wouldn't you think the covers should have proclaimed (after a few months break following the trim from 52 pages) "8 extra pages!" or something like that? After all, from the point in mid-1952 when most 10¢ comics were reduced to 36 pages except for a few from Dell and Archie, it might have been a good selling point. On the other hand, Dell and Archie prominently played up their 52-page titles, so maybe DC thought that even 44 would seem chintzy by comparison.

Big Town #12 (Dec 1951) appeared during a period when many DC comics stressed a mild horror theme. Issue #12 was on the stands concurrently with DC's first horror comic, House of Mystery #1.


NEW STORIES OF TV AND RADIO'S HIT SHOW!
DEC. NO.12
10¢
BIG TOWN
HORROR HOVERS OVER BIG TOWN AS ACE CRIME REPORTER STEVE WILSON UNCOVERS "The SECRET of the DEAD MAN'S SHOES!"

In one respect, *Big Town* was an anomaly, since newspaper stories in the realm of popular culture already had largely lost their popularity in the 1950s. They were huge in the movies, on radio, and in the pulp magazines of the 1930s and '40s, however.

Big Town was a highly successful radio show, beginning in 1937 on the CBS Network and running original shows at least through 1948 (repeats apparently aired through 1952, since the last plug for the radio show appeared on the cover of *Big Town* #17 (September/ October 1952). Steve Wilson was first played on the radio by famed Warner Brothers' gangster actor, Edward G. Robinson, then by the much lesser known Edward Pawley and Walter Greaza.

The *Big Town* original television shows ran for six years through October 2, 1956 (television indexes note that the short-lived Dumont network ran repeats in 1953 under the title *City Assignment*). CBS dropped the show in September of 1954, but NBC picked it up for its last two seasons. Two actors played Steve Wilson, neither of whom achieved much fame—Patrick McVey and Mark Stephens.

DC's last cover plug for the TV show was on issue #44 (March/April 1957). Since that issue first appeared on the stands in January and was written and edited a few weeks before that, this corresponds almost exactly to the end of the TV show. In retrospect, it's unusual that DC kept the title on the stands for another year, since to the best of my knowledge the show was not immediately syndicated.

Big Town must have been directed almost entirely at adults, making the success of the comic book that much more unlikely. My memories of television go back to the 1952-53 season, when I was four years old and wildly enthusiastic about both *I Love Lucy* and *Superman*. But I don't ever remember seeing the *Big Town* TV show or even being aware of its existence.

As for the comic book, I had been buying comics regularly for two years by the time the *Big Town* title expired in 1958. I remember seeing it on the stands but I don't ever recall being tempted to buy it except for issue #48 (November/December 1957), which featured a bogus space alien on the cover. (You've got to remember, in those days every dime was precious for most lower-middle class and middle class youngsters, with a purchasing power generally equal to 75¢ or a dollar today.)

As for the films, well, Steve Wilson deserved better. Paramount produced four *Big Town* programmers (60-70 minute second-feature films back in those wonderful days when theaters almost always showed two movies)—*Big Town*, *Big Town After Dark* and *I Cover Big Town*, all in 1947, and *Big Town Scandal* in 1948. (These were later re-released to television under other titles, apparently because of the *Big Town* license.)

All four films starred little-known Philip Reed as Steve

Wilson and better-known Hillary Brooke as reporter/love interest Lorelei Kilbourne. Brooke, however, was usually regarded throughout the 1940s and '50s for playing "predatory women," "first-rate bad girls" and "occasionally a strong-willed heroine," according to David Quinlan's marvelous reference, *The Illustrated Registry of Film Stars*.

Interestingly, the first two actresses who played Lorelei on the radio were Claire Trevor (shortly before her film career took off) and Ona Munson (who was a wonderful character actress in films, best known as the archetypal "prostitute with a heart of gold" in *Gone With the Wind*. One other comic book-related actor was in *Gone With the Wind... George Reeves!*). There were five versions of Lorelei on TV—Mary Wells, Julie Stevens, Jane Nigh, Beverly Tyler and Trudy Wroe—none of whom was ever well-known. Surely, five lead actresses in six years set a never-to-be-broken TV record for one show!

I've managed to rent only the first *Big Town* film, which was a decent potboiler and was cover-featured with the lead story in the first issue of Fiction House's short-lived *Movie Comics* (#1-4, 1946-47). I'd love to see the other three films. However, to show what a small impact on movie history these four films had, the seminal book on newspaper movies, *Stop the Presses!* by Alex Barris (1976), does not even mention any of the four *Big Town* films!

(By way of digression... does anyone know of any other books devoted entirely to newspaper films? *Stop the Presses!* is the only one I have in my reference library.)

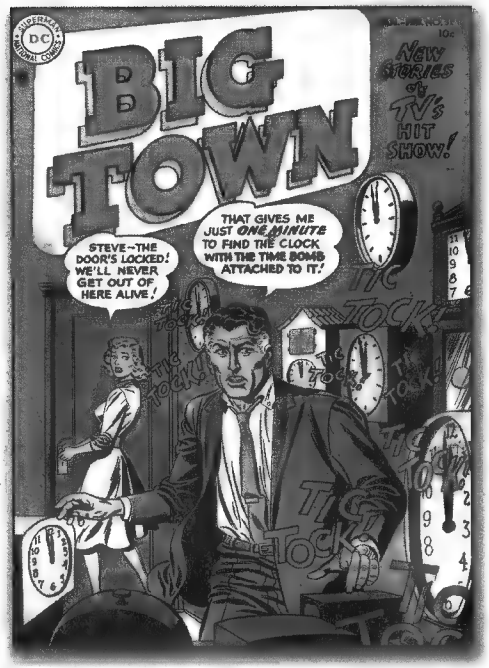
For that matter, I know of no extensive reference on pulp magazine newspaper stories, just a few fanzine articles and checklists. Yet I'll bet I have hundreds of newspaper reporter-related stories contained in my pulp collection (which number a little more than than 1,000... a small percentage of the more than 35,000 pulps published from the 1920s through the 1950s).

What does all this TV, radio and film trivia have to do with comics? Simple: I mention it to emphasize how truly different the *Big Town* comic book must have seemed on the newsstands of the time (much less today).

And therein lies the perplexing question... why did it succeed? Since Steve Wilson looked no different than any other comic book detective (which is what he really was), and his stories featured neither gimmicks nor gore. I've always pondered why this comic book succeeded when others failed. Perhaps the answer is connected with the support resulting from the character's license obtained from CBS.

Don't get me wrong. I love *Big Town* (or I probably wouldn't be writing this)... but I can't help but think that *Danger Trail* (which ran only five issues in 1950-51), *The Phantom Stranger* (six issues in 1952-53) or even *Congo Bill* (seven issues in 1954-55) would have had far more appeal to youngsters than *Big Town*!

And *Big Town* surely was a success, or DC would not have let it run 50 issues. The company's annals are filled with short-run titles during the 1950s and '60s, indicating that profit was paramount and cancellation the swift fate of any title not pulling its weight on the stands. Perhaps *Big Town* succeeded because, unlike most crime comics, the covers depended heavily on plot devices rather than sheer gore. There was always some mysterious story for Steve Wilson to chase down. These are often truly ingenious tales.


BIG TOWN
NEW STORIES of TV's HIT SHOW!
STEVE--THE DOOR'S LOCKED! WE'LL NEVER GET OUT OF HERE ALIVE!
THAT GIVES ME JUST ONE MINUTE TO FIND THE CLOCK WITH THE TIME BOMB ATTACHED TO IT!
TICK TOCK

Big Town #31 (Jan/Feb 1955) is the last pre-Code issue. Its cover shows how DC already had anticipated the Comics Code.

Most of the covers were strictly of the cops-and-robbers type, although eight of the 50 featured twists. These eight were #12 (a graveyard horror theme), #13 (a weird hermit), #14 (the only gorilla cover of the series), #15 (a strange black wildcat), #34 (a *House of Mystery* type featuring a curse behind a door), #35 (a *Tales of the Unexpected* type featuring a cartoonist), #48 (the aforementioned bogus alien cover), and #50 (featuring a time capsule).

The only greytone cover of the series was #46 (July/August 1957), but I consider this one of the least attractive of all DC greytones. It was a perspective cover of crooks in hats. Interestingly, this was just before DC started dropping hats from most men in their comic book series, since hats on men were rapidly fading from the cultural and fashion scene.

There was no origin story for Steve Wilson in the first issue of *Big Town*, but that's not surprising for a comic book that owed its existence entirely to other media. Like many newspaper stories, it's far from realistic, especially the cover—"Boys, we're going to get out that extra—even if there is a killer loose in the city room!" Steve says while Lorelei cringes at a shadowy figure holding a gun.

Just as cops love to point out the flaws in police shows and doctors can't quite believe what they see on medical shows, newspaper people have always enjoyed spotting the hokum of newspaper fiction. Oddly, though, the differences are not as great as most people might believe, since being a reporter really can be a remarkably romantic profession (being an editor is something else, especially these days, when many editors have been forced to become backshop production people and typesetters with the advent of computers and cost-cutting).

Many of the absurdities of newspaper stories deal with small things. One good example is the phony typewritten note from Lorelei to Steve in the first story in *Big Town* #1. I guarantee

BIG TOWN FN PRICES!

(#31 is last pre-Code issue)

#1	$150
#2	$84
#3-10	$47
#11-20	$32
#21-31	$26
#32-50	$20

(From *OPG* #28)

you that in real life that would have been immediately spotted as phony, since the hundreds of reporters and editors I have known in real life all had distinctive note styles in pre-computer days, often typing them exactly the same way every day (All lower-case letters, or with dates, or certain initials, etc. The variations are endless.).

For that matter, whenever I see a rerun of the 1950's *Superman* television show, I always get a chuckle out of Clark Kent' s private office. Talk about unrealistic! I will always have a soft spot in my heart for that show, however, since it inspired me to think about getting into reporting and writing at a very young age.

In a story in *Big Town* #47 (September/October 1957), Steve tells one of his employees, "Thanks for the news tip, Mark! Guess it's the first one I received from a rewrite man!" In reality, a good rewrite man back in the pre-computer days of newspapers often was one of the most observant people on any newspaper, whether or not he ever got out of the office on the job. Rewrite men (and they were almost all men back in those days) were invaluable in the days before computers forced newspapers to hire reporters who could set their own type, since rewrite men often composed stories from "leg men" who were good at getting the news but not at writing it.

In the tale "Arrest Me—I'm a Murderer" in *Big Town* #4 (April 1951), one of the captions explains that "Lorelei indulges in the favorite pastime of all journalists—reading their own stories." Then she complains to Steve, "What's the idea of cutting two paragraphs of my story?" He replies, "Sorry, Lorelei! It had to be done to make room for the picture!" There's a lot of truth to all of this, but in real life not many reporters— even the "Girl Friday" of an editor—would have the nerve to complain about two paragraphs being cut out of a newspaper story! If I had a nickel for every newspaper paragraph I've had cut, I probably could buy a high-grade *Superman* #1!

Lorelei was not on all the covers of *Big Town* and last appeared on the cover of #36 (November/December 1955). The woman on the cover of #47 was not Lorelei.

Big Town often put Steve Wilson into human interest stories, which is one reason I like the series so much. For example, "The Mystery Reporter of the Illustrated Press!" in #37 (January/February 1956) tells the tale of how a newspaper janitor helped his son—a failing reporter who did not know the janitor was his father—to recover his confidence by sticking a prize-winning series in his typewriter! The janitor, of course, also had been a great reporter in his day. It all works out well in the end, thanks to Steve and Lorelei. It's this kind of story that convinces me that not all post-Comics Code comics are a wasteland!

Another good human interest story in #38 (March/April 1956) was entitled "The Clue of the Tolling Bell!" and involved the promotion of a newspaper "question man" to full-fledged reporter. Incidentally, one of the most popular Nancy Drew Books, first written in 1946, was entitled *The Mystery of the Tolling Bell*.

Issue #38, by the way, marked the last appearance of Lorelei, who was an inspiration in all four media versions of *Big Town* because she was usually portrayed as a dynamic, competent woman rather than a victim or a flunky. Perhaps the fact that the television show was coming to an end had something to do with writing Lorelei out of the series. At any rate, the last dozen issues of *Big Town* became primarily a crime comic, although still with well-written stories.

Big Town #45 (May/June 1957) featured a fascinating 10-page story about a daydream by Steve about his counterpart "Steev" 100 years hence in the 21st century. This story could have been taken right from *Mystery In Space*. It's a little gem! And it's interesting to note that, as usual, this DC Comics story of the future projected many more fantastic inventions than are likely to really exist in the year 2157.

Big Town vanished forever after #50. As usual in those days, there was no indication this was to be the last issue. In general, the earliest issues of *Big Town* are the best, although they are all good. But the 10-page stories in the 52-page issues allowed for the most plot development, although some of the 6 and 8-pagers are remarkable in that regard.

One of the best early stories was "The Cruelest Racket in the World" in #3 (March 1951), in which Steve battles a scheme involving orphans and along the way finds a home for one of them with one of his staff members. This story is typical of the up-beat emphasis on human values that is found in many DC stories of the 1950s.

Another story of that type is "Badge of Courage!" in #4 (April 1951), in which Steve helps the young brother of a murdered officer become an honorary policeman. Contrary to many of the critics of the comics, I will always believe the values expressed in many DC Comics stories actually helped youngsters to grow up with a healthier attitude.

One such story was "The Tin Hero of Big Town!" in #9 (September 1951), in which Steve is shown as a human being with human failures, much to the disillusionment of a young hero worshipper with a scrap book full of Steve's stories. The plot is far from original, yet stories like this couldn't help but be a good influence on youngsters.

Likewise, "Old Newsmen Never Die!" in #13 (January/ February 1952) told the heart-warming story about how Steve revived the faith of several elderly journalists. How could a child read this and not gain more respect for the plight and the abilities of the elderly?

Another regular character in the early issues of *Big Town* was Harry the Hack, a more realistic version of Green Lantern's Doiby Dickles of the 1940s. Harry the Hack was played by Mason Adams on the radio—the same Mason Adams who more than 20 years later went on to play the curmudgeonly managing editor Charlie Hume on the *Lou Grant* television show (which, of course, is one of my all-time favorites).

A few of the early stories featured the marvelous light touch of Harry the Hack's malapropos, but these were soon written out of the series as it became more involved in straight mystery and crime stories. Harry once calls the newspaper "The Illustrious Press" and says he "depreciates" helping the police while helping them to solve an "incredulous" adventure.

As far as which issues of *Big Town* are the scarcest, I honestly can't be sure, simply because almost all issues of this series are uncommon, at least when compared with most DC titles of the period. I would compare it to *Sugar & Spike*, another extremely difficult DC title to complete, albeit one that started five years later than *Big Town*. From my viewpoint, any given issue of *Big Town* can be tough to find if you are trying to complete the run. The last one I acquired to finish the set was #41 (September/October 1956) about eight years ago, but I've since seen a couple of other copies.

Perhaps it's best expressed this way: Since you usually see a few issues of *Big Town* at major conventions, the entire run of the title doesn't seem as scarce as it is. But I challenge anyone to complete this series! I would really like to know if anyone besides Ye Editor and this writer has a complete set.

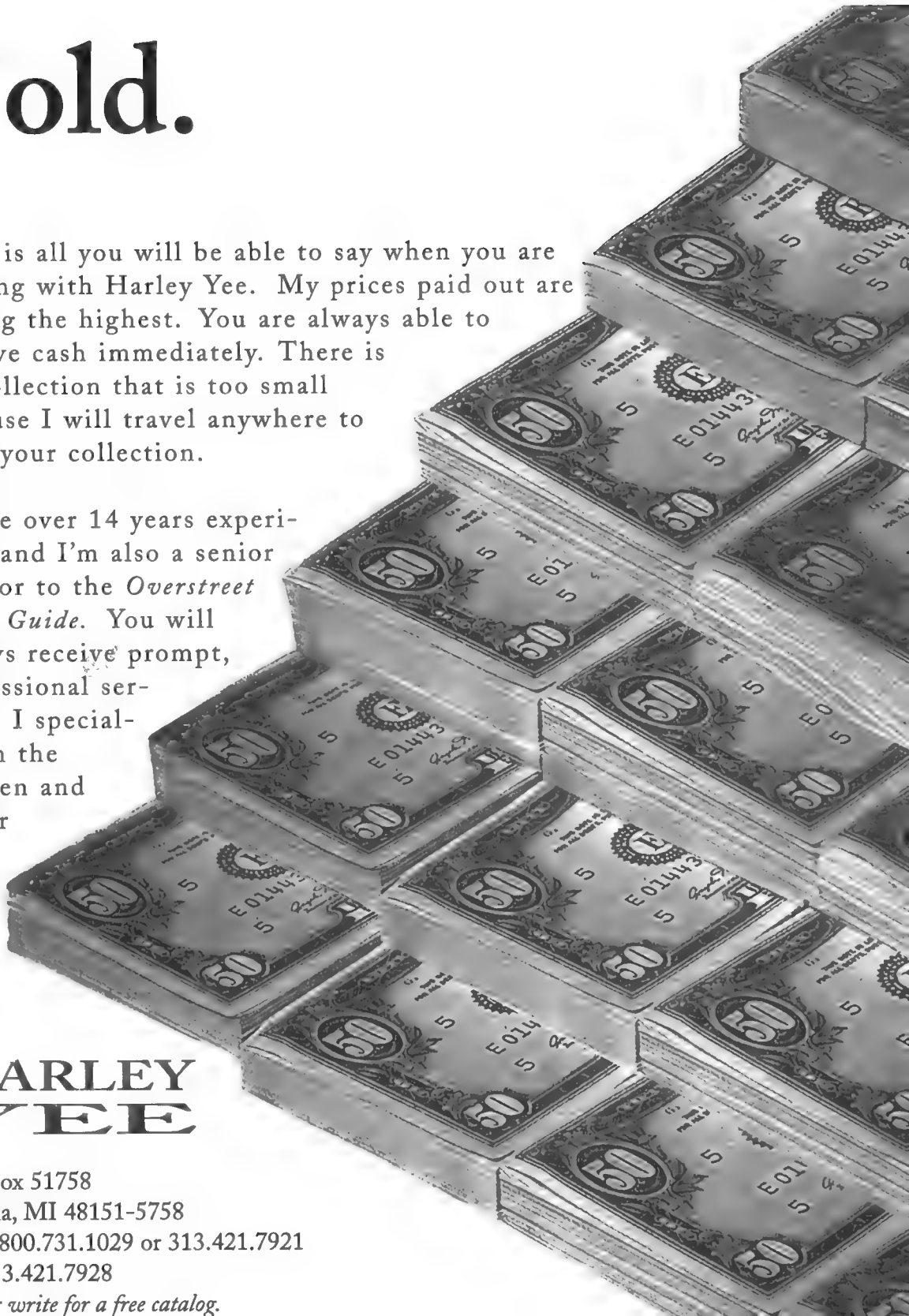
Now that would be worth a headline!

Michelle Nolan is a nationally recognized collector and researcher of comic books from '40s through the '60s. She has one of the most extensive collections of 1950s comic books in the US.

Sold.

That is all you will be able to say when you are dealing with Harley Yee. My prices paid out are among the highest. You are always able to receive cash immediately. There is no collection that is too small because I will travel anywhere to view your collection.

I have over 14 years experience and I'm also a senior advisor to the *Overstreet Price Guide*. You will always receive prompt, professional service. I specialize in the Golden and Silver Age.



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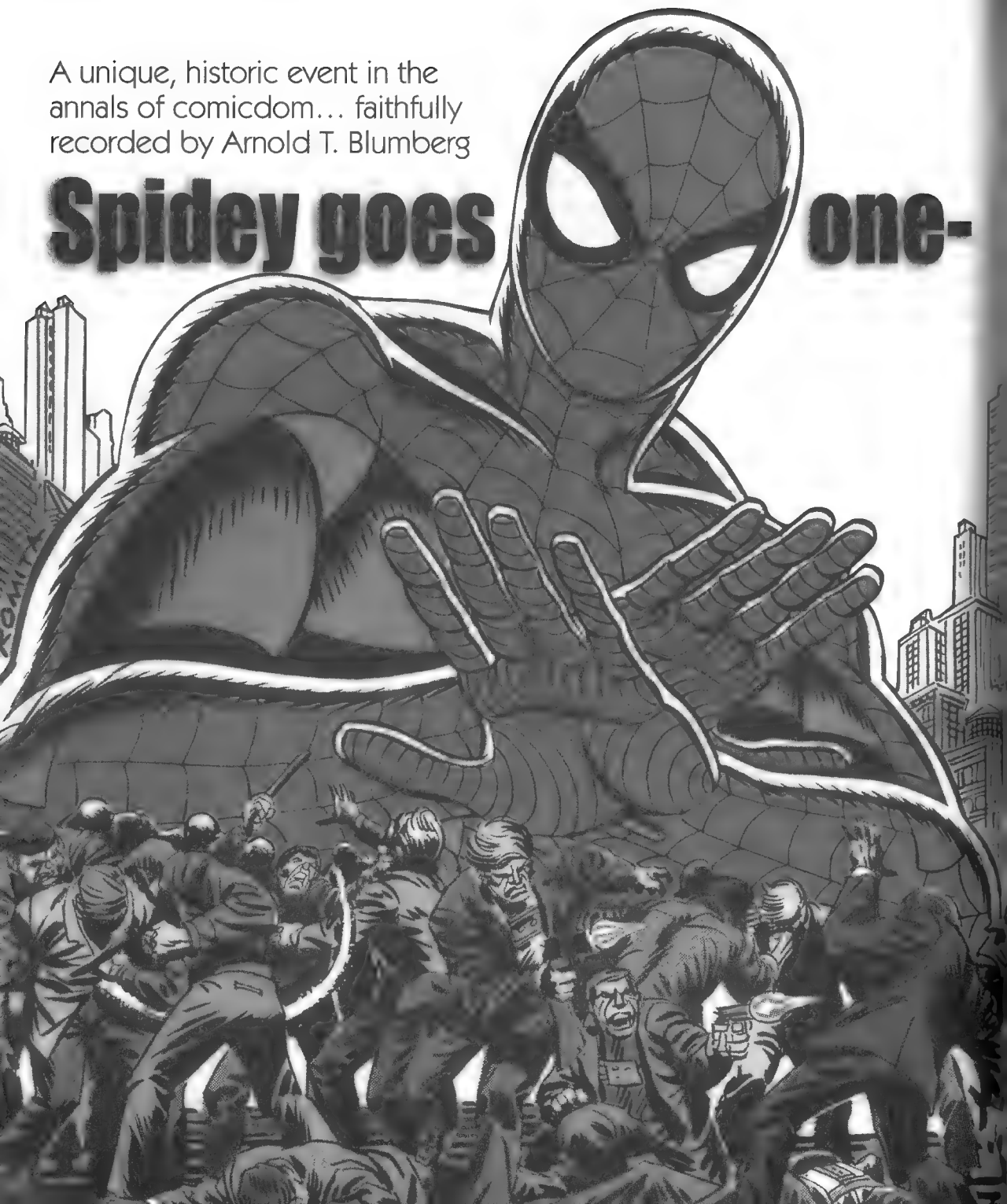
Spidey goes one-



on-one with Stan Lee!

SPIDER-MAN INTERVIEWS STAN LEE!

Hey there, true believers! It's me, your ever-lovin', friendly neighborhood Spider-Man, and boy have I got a story to tell you! Y'know, I've been fighting the good fight and trying to make ends meet for over thirty years now, and I'll tell ya, after some pretty rough times and a few tight spots I thought I'd never get out of, things are finally starting to look up for your favorite amazing arachnid! I've got a great new job doing what I love—science—and some snazzy New York digs for when it's time to head home and rest the ol' noggin. And how could I forget MJ? She's the best wife a harried hero could hope for, and she's a knock-out to boot!

But that's not why we're here today. I wanted to share with you an incredible experience I recently had, one I just couldn't keep to my cuddly self any longer! After four decades of battling lunatic bad guys, taking care of Aunt May, and snapping the odd picture for the Daily Bugle and its resident curmudgeon, J. Jonah Jameson, I finally had the chance to sit down and chat with the man who made it all possible—the man who created me and allowed all of you loyal fans the chance to see into my world! That's right, I'm talking about Stan "The Man" Lee himself, the guy who charted the course to new heights of fantasy and adventure with Marvel Comics, and the amazing writer who thought up yours truly!

You've probably heard more about Stan over the years than I could even think to tell you, and some of you may even have read about him recently in *CBM* #61. But here for the first time, you can read what happened when I had the chance to put my creator on the spot, and ask him the really tough questions. So what are ya waiting for, an engraved invitation? Read on, oh dedicated Spider-phile!

SPIDER-MAN: Hi, Stan! Thanks for taking the time to chat with me.

STAN LEE: Hey there, Spidey! It sure is a thrill to finally meet you face to face!

SPIDER-MAN: Gosh, it's kinda tough for me not to get a little tongue-tied, but I guess it's not every day a guy gets the chance to quiz his own maker about the meaning behind it all. I'd hate to mess this up, so I suppose I should get right to the heart of it and ask the question I've always wanted to ask—why me? I mean, look at all the crud I have to deal with every day! People who despise me, an aunt who suffers a near-fatal heart attack every five minutes, a boss who barely acknowledges my talent while thoroughly trashing my alter ego in the papers, and weird, super-powered nutcases who only want to pound me into the pavement! I don't get the glory like Torchie and his FF buddies, and I'm not exactly on a level with Thor and Doc Strange when it comes to the big stuff. How d'ya expect a regular guy like me to handle all this, proportional spider-strength notwithstanding?

STAN: Fact is, Spidey, I wanted you to be typical of every guy who reads comics and wishes he had super powers. I wanted to show that such powers can be as much of a curse as a blessing. And I've a hunch my titanically talented partner, Steve Ditko, felt the same way, 'cause he sure joined me in dreaming up the wildest sort of woes for you month after month. But, hey, things haven't been all bad with you, have they? I mean, you're married to a beautiful girl and live in one of the world's most excit-

Stan Lee faces off with his most famous creation... Spider-Man!

ing cities—and you don't have to pound the keys of a computer night and day, worrying about making deadlines, like certain superhero writers I could mention!

SPIDER-MAN: Well, OK, maybe that came off a bit too ungrateful. After all, I wouldn't be here if it wasn't for you, Stan. Actually, that brings to mind something else...did you create me in your own image? Maybe that's corny, but is there anything of you in little ol' me?

STAN: Actually, you're right. I did think of myself when I first dreamed you up. I figure I'm a pretty typical guy who has pretty typical problems, so why should you be different? Think about it—nothing ever turns out perfect for anyone, right? So join the crowd, Bunky.

The moment that chilled a generation of readers, as Peter discovers that the Goblin has abducted Gwen. Surely, we thought, everything will turn out all right in the end. We had no idea...

SPIDER-MAN: I hear ya. Still, thinking back over the years, is there anything you'd change about me if you could go back and do it again? I know I'd probably ask to be a better seamstress, but that's just me. After a few tattered costumes, you get to wishing you could thread a needle on the first try.

STAN: Nah. I like you just the way you are. Besides, after more than 30 years I've sort of gotten used to you.

SPIDER-MAN: Thanks, I've grown attached to me too. Y'know, I mentioned Torchie before, and it occurs to me, I haven't exactly been alone in this thing. There've been people who stuck with me, like ol' Hornhead (Daredevil), Doc Connors, even Reed and the FF. But the matchstick and I have this weird friendship that even we don't quite understand. We started out hating each other, but now I'd crawl into a burning building for the guy (not that he'd need help in that case). In a weird way, he's like the brother I never had. Is any of this drawn from your life? Besides me and Storm, you've had similar sibling relationships in the FF and the early X-Men too. Childhood memories? I'm a biochemist, not a psychologist, but I thought I'd give it a shot.

STAN: Sure, there are people I started out disliking who eventually turned into good friends of mine. And I have a brother, Larry Lieber, who does a great job drawing your adventures in 500 newspapers every weekday—although I must admit I've always liked him. Friends and relationships are important to me, so I wanted them to be important to you, too.

SPIDER-MAN: Are they ever! And man, I must be the hardest working man in comics, appearing in several monthly titles, a cartoon, that newspaper strip, even occasional books and television. It gets pretty hard to keep track of where I am and who I'm fighting from one minute to the next! I've also been from the sewers of New York to the realm of Dormammu! I still feel like just a simple guy at heart, but I've seen some weird stuff. What

ALL SPIDER-MAN LOGOS & GRAPHICS © 1999 MEG

OH, PETER--PETER! IT BREAKS MY HEART TO SEE YOU LIKE THIS!
I LOVE YOU SO MUCH--SO VERY MUCH!
CLICK
THE DOOR! SOMEONE'S COMING!
HI, GWEN! WE PASSED MRS. PARKER IN THE HALL, AND--HEY! WHAT GIVES?
HARRY! FLASH! I'M SO GLAD YOU'RE HERE!
PETER JUST ARRIVED! HE ISN'T HURT OR ANYTHING--BUT HE WAS SO TIRED HE COULDN'T STAY AWAKE!
ANY CLOWN WHO CAN'T STAY AWAKE WHEN YOU'RE AROUND, HONEY--!
STOP IT, FLASH! IT'S NOTHING TO JOKE ABOUT!
MAYBE HE ISN'T A BIG, STRONG, RUGGED WAR HERO LIKE YOU, BUT--
WHOA! EASY, GWEN! FLASH WAS JUST KIDDING!
WOW! I'VE HEARD OF TIGRESSES FIGHTING FOR THEIR MATES--BUT THEY'VE GOT NOTHING ON YOU, LADY!
I DON'T MEAN TO GO GETTING ALL UPTIGHT, BUT--
I JUST CAN'T BEAR IT WHEN I HEAR PEOPLE PUTTING POOR PETER DOWN!
MAYBE HE'S NOT YOUR CUP OF TEA--BUT HE'S ALL THE MAN I'LL EVER WANT!

made me the Marvel ambassador of goodwill throughout the universe? I could use a nap sometimes (or some R&R with MJ).

STAN: If you think it's been confusing to you, imagine what it's been like for me! I didn't even write most of your stories after the first unforgettable years, so I can hardly remember all the places you've been or the nutcases you've met up with. Anyway, stop griping, willya? You don't hear me complaining to you!

SPIDER-MAN: Sorry, Stan. I have to admit, when it comes to Rogues' Galleries, I think I've got that Dark Knight guy beat with megalomaniacs like Doc Doom, criminal masterminds like the Kingpin, mad scientists like Ock, and full-blown lunatics like the Green Goblin (all of them). I've fought some real losers too, like the Gibbon, the Kangaroo (sheesh!), and even just a Guy named Joe. Any of these jokers (oops) stick out in your mind as your favorites? Any of 'em you wish you could sweep under the rug?

STAN: Wouldja believe I love each and every one of our villains, the great ones and the icky ones. Without them, you'd be just another shutterbug that no one ever heard of. Hey, if you were really considerate, you ought to send those burgeoning baddies a bonus check every year to show your gratitude. But if I hadda pick a favorite, it would probably be Doc Ock. As for a Guy named Joe, you've gotta admit it took a lot of guts to inflict so offbeat a villain on our defenseless readers.

SPIDER-MAN: True, but then you've also given them some great gals to gaze at too. For a guy *(Continued on page 24)*

In their short time together as friends and lovers, Gwen and Peter weathered some serious crises, including the death of her father at the hands of Doc Ock (a murder pinned on Spidey) and Peter's numerous brushes with the reaper.

The Smoking Gun

After 25 Years, Comic Book Marketplace finally reveals the TRUE Answer to the Question, "Who Killed Gwen Stacy?"

by Arnold T. Blumberg

In the May 8, 1999 issue of *Comics Buyer's Guide* (#1277), Scott Brick attempted to lay to rest the many mysteries surrounding the publication of "The Night Gwen Stacy Died." Featuring exhaustive interviews with Stan Lee, Roy Thomas, Gerry Conway, John Romita, and Gil Kane, the article purported to finally answer the three greatest questions posed by the story—"Who killed Gwen Stacy (editorially, that is)?" "Why was she chosen to die?" and "How exactly did she die?"

While the article solved the first fairly quickly (most of us already knew Conway, then the writer on the title, shared at least partial credit for the decision), the *CBG* piece did not clarify the motivations for the decision beyond some small attempts at an explanation from Romita and Conway. What is most glaring, however, is that this article did not in any way settle the single greatest unanswered question about the tragedy, the one that fans have debated for years without end—a debate that Fred Hembeck actually referred to in his own piece in that same issue—how did Gwen Stacy die?

The article spends considerable time trying to pin down who added the infamous "snap" sound effect to the panel in which Spidey catches Gwen's leg in his webline. When confronted with this notion, only Conway managed to muster up a partial answer, suggesting that some "subliminal" intention on his part may have swayed his decision to include the "snap." According to Hembeck's commentary, although many have harbored the notion that Parker killed Gwen, "the matter is never again broached. Uh uh. It was the fall that killed her."

Well, that's not exactly true, It was not only broached, it was definitively settled in print, and the proof has been waiting patiently for 25 years! Now at last, after over two decades of debate, *Comic Book Marketplace* can reveal beyond a shadow of a doubt the awful truth: PETER PARKER KILLED GWEN STACY!

Perhaps the memory of these men has been clouded by time, or perhaps they regret the decision so much that they have chosen to forget the horrific circumstances they themselves created, but here for the first time in 25 years is the answer to the question, "How did Gwen Stacy die?"

This text piece, advertised in *Amazing Spider-Man* #124 as "So NOW You Know Who to Blame," appeared only four months after the classic tale in the letters column of *Amazing* #125. Uncovered during research for another article in this issue, this writer was shocked to uncover this statement, which not only states unequivocally that Peter's own actions killed Gwen, but that the editorial staff had full knowledge of that plot point *(Continued on page 62)*

HONEST TO GOSH--WE DIDN'T FORGET ABOUT SPIDER-MAN! YOU'LL SEE HIM REAL SOON--WE PROMISE! BUT FIRST, LET'S RETURN TO EMPIRE STATE U. JUST ONCE MORE--
PETER PARKER IS THE ONLY BOY I'VE MET WHO HASN'T GIVEN ME A TUMBLE!
AND THAT'S A CHALLENGE NO GIRL CAN RESIST!
HE'S LEAVING THE LAB NOW! THIS IS MY CHANCE TO GET TO KNOW HIM BETTER!
IF I GET TO THE HOSPITAL EARLIER, I'LL BE ABLE TO VISIT LONGER WITH AUNT MAY!
WEL-LO THERE, PETER! I'M GLAD I BUMPED INTO YOU! DO YOU HAVE A MINUTE--?
I'M AWFULLY SORRY! YOU'LL HAVE TO EXCUSE ME! I'M IN A REAL BIG HURRY! CAN'T STOP NOW!
WHY--THE UNMITIGATED NERVE OF HIM!
NOBODY GIVES GWEN STACY THE BRUSH-OFF THAT WAY!
YOU, YOUNG MAN, ARE GOING TO REGRET THAT--I PROMISE!

The original Ditko-drawn Gwen was concerned with Peter's lack of interest only as an affront to her ego. Then John Romita took over the art chores, softening Gwen in both style and personality... creating the perfect idealized girlfriend for Peter and the magazine's readership.

YOU'RE ALL AGAIN... USING WHATEVER MEANS TO GET CONTROL OF THE PUBLIC... DRUGS, GAMBLING, LOAN-SHARK OPERATIONS...
AND ON TOP OF LEGITIMATE... BUT ALL OF IT DIRTY.
SOMETIMES I WONDER IF THAT EVIL'S RUBBED OFF ON ME...

BY ARNOLD T. BLUMBERG

In the Lonely Dark Chamber gives us a peek at the psyche of the mysterious Punisher and portrays him as a man straddling the line between good and evil

Childhood's End

The Evolution of Gregg Stock & the Arrival of the Punisher

INTO THE NIGHT

Spidey Interviews Stan Lee!

Continued from page 21

who always seems to be down on his luck, I've had my share of romance, from the early days of Betty Brant… to Gwen… and finally, MJ. Were any of these women based on people you knew in real life? I can tell you, some of the heartache certainly felt real.

STAN: I knew a lot of fabulous females in my wild youth, so I guess I probably based every one of your relationships on someone or some incident I dimly remembered. Chances are, every writer does that, either consciously or unconsciously. And as for the heartache, sorry, but it goes with the territory, kid.

SPIDER-MAN: Right before you left me (Stan stopped scripting *Amazing Spider-Man* with #100), I was getting in to some really tight scrapes, from riots on college campuses and in prisons to the effects of drug addiction on my best friend. You took some pretty strong stands, and you even went without the Comics Code to make a point. Not that I disagreed with you—I've always been kind of a morally conscious, opinionated guy—but why did you start to tell these politically-oriented stories? Was it because I was more 'normal' than say a Norse god or a Master of the Mystic Arts, or was it something else?

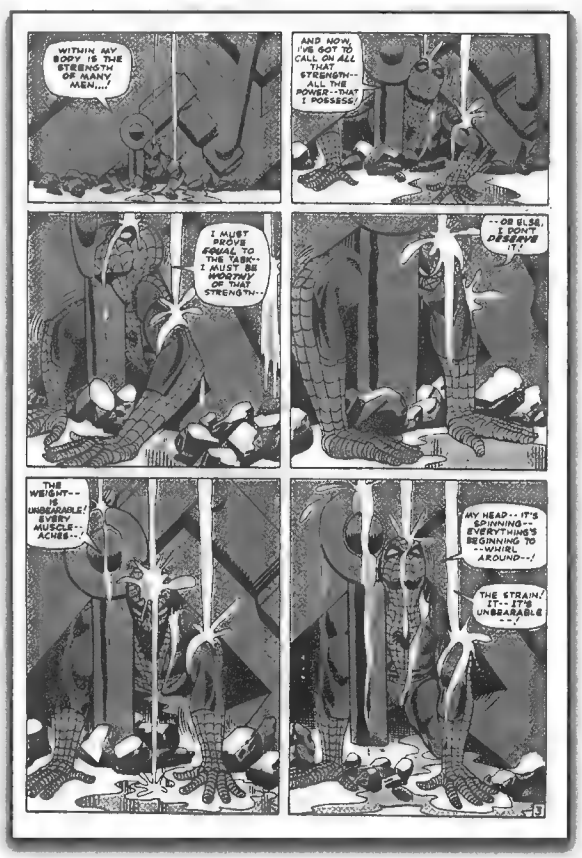
STAN: You hit the nail on the head, pal. It was because you were the most normal of the lot—that is, if you can call a web-swingin', wall-crawlin', masked do-gooder with the proportionate strength of a spider "normal!"

SPIDER-MAN: OK, here's one I just have to ask. Why did you leave? We stuck through some pretty tough times before you decided to go, and to top it all off, within a couple years of you leaving me, some other guy came along and killed my best girl Gwen! I mean, talk about the ol' Parker luck running true to form! My life became a nightmare without you!

STAN: You'll never know how it broke me up when I had to put you in the care of others, sonny boy. But there was no way out. My life just became too complicated for me to continue as a script writer. I had to go around the country lecturing and doing interviews and getting involved with our animated cartoons and movie and TV projects. Then, before I knew it, I was named publisher and I had to hang with the "suits." You think you had problems in your life? Some day I'll tell you what it's like dealing with suits! As for what happened to Gwen (I always

Often described by Stan as one of the defining moments of Spider-Man's career—the very portrait of a true hero—this stunning Ditko sequence originally appeared in Amazing Spider-Man #33, "The Final Chapter" in the classic three-part Master Planner saga.

I'VE GOT TO TRY TO FREE MYSELF--NO MATTER HOW IMPOSSIBLE IT SEEMS!
AND LIFTING IS THE ONLY WAY! THE--ONLY--WAY--!
--UNHHHH!--I CAN'T!--SO EXHAUSTED--AFTER ALL THAT FIGHTING--I--I FEEL SO WEAK--!
BUT THEN, THE AMAZING TEENAGER GLIMPSES THE LIFE-SAVING SERUM--SO NEAR, AND YET SO FAR--SO HOPELESSLY FAR AWAY!
IT'S LYING THERE--JUST BEYOND REACH--AS THOUGH MOCKING ME--TAUNTING ME--
IT'S THE ONE THING--THE ONLY THING--THAT MAY SAVE AUNT MAY! AND I CAN'T BRING IT TO HER--!
IF SHE--DOESN'T MAKE IT--IT'LL BE MY FAULT! JUST THE WAY I'VE ALWAYS BLAMED MYSELF FOR WHAT HAPPENED TO UNCLE BEN!...
FROM THE MOMENTOUS TALE OF SPIDEY'S ORIGIN--REMEMBER--?
THE TWO PEOPLE IN ALL THE WORLD WHO'VE BEEN KINDEST TO ME! I CAN'T FAIL AGAIN! IT CAN'T HAPPEN A SECOND TIME! I WON'T LET IT--I WON'T!
NO MATTER WHAT THE ODDS--NO MATTER WHAT THE COST--I'LL GET THAT SERUM TO AUNT MAY, AND MAYBE THEN I'LL NO LONGER BE HAUNTED BY THE MEMORY--OF UNCLE BEN!


WITHIN MY BODY IS THE STRENGTH OF MANY MEN...!
AND NOW, I'VE GOT TO CALL ON ALL THAT STRENGTH--ALL THE POWER--THAT I POSSESS!
I MUST PROVE EQUAL TO THE TASK--I MUST BE WORTHY OF THAT STRENGTH--
--OR ELSE, I DON'T DESERVE IT!
THE WEIGHT--IS UNBEARABLE! EVERY MUSCLE--ACHES--
MY HEAD--IT'S SPINNING--EVERYTHING'S BEGINNING TO--WHIRL AROUND--!
THE STRAIN! IT--IT'S UNBEARABLE--!

The two faces of evil; millionaire industrialist Norman Osborn, and his alter ego Green Goblin.

loved calling her Gwendy), I think I felt as broken up as you did about her tragic fate—after all, you just fell in love with her, but Jazzy Johnny Romita and I created the lady!

SPIDER-MAN: I know our time is running short, so I have one more thing to say, creator o' mine. As you well know, I never had a real father when I was growing up, but Uncle Ben was the best father I could ever hope for. In a way, you're as much my dad as he ever was, so… aw shucks, what I'm trying to say is, are you proud of me? Have I done OK? I've tried to live up to the great power and great responsibility jazz, and I only hope it's been enough.

STAN: Am I proud of you? Look, the only way I can put it is—I hope I can be half the man you are, Petey! You've taken the worst life has to offer and always come back undaunted and ready to face whatever new challenges may await you. You may not have been perfect, but who is? It's even been rumored that I myself may have a fault or two, impossible as that may seem! But the most important thing is—you always did your best, and nobody can do better than that. I'd say more, you wonderful ol' webhead, but I know you hate to see a grown man cry! Excelsior!

(Dad!)

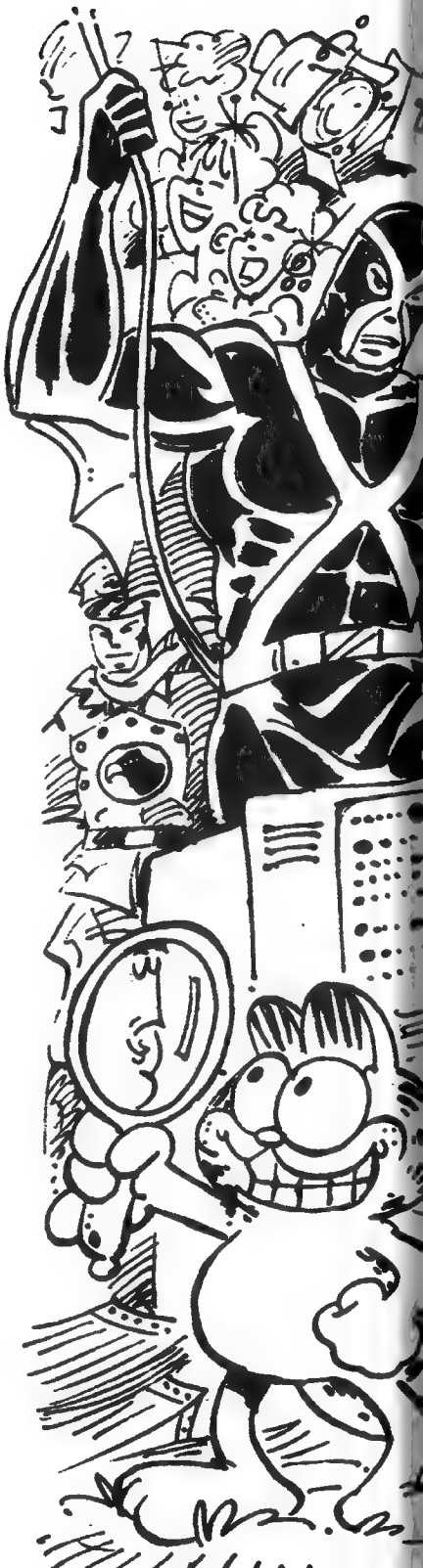
SPIDER-MAN: Thanks for sharing this special event with me, and I'll see ya all in the funny papers!

THE CRACK IN THE CEILING--IT'S GROWING WIDER--GETTING BIGGER EVERY SECOND! I'LL NEVER MAKE IT--I CAN'T--!
NO! I DARE NOT GIVE UP NOW! IF I CLOSE MY EYES--I'LL GO UNDER! MUST STAY AWAKE--MUST CLEAR MY HEAD! KEEP TRYING --TRYING--!
I'LL DO IT, AUNT MAY! I WON'T FAIL YOU! NO MATTER WHAT--I WON'T FAIL--!
ANYONE CAN WIN A FIGHT--WHEN THE ODDS--ARE EASY! IT'S WHEN THE GOING'S TOUGH--WHEN THERE SEEMS TO BE NO CHANCE--THAT'S WHEN--IT COUNTS!
EVERYTHING GOING BLACK--MY HEAD--ACHING! HOLD ON--I MUST HOLD ON--!
IT'S MOVING! CAN'T STOP NOW! LAST CHANCE! MUST KEEP THE MOMENTUM --MORE! JUST A LITTLE MORE--!

AND THEN--AS THE AGONIZING ACHE IN HIS LIMBS SEEMS UNENDURABLE--AS HIS SUPERBLY MUSCLED BODY SUFFERS THE TORMENT OF A VIRTUALLY INDESCRIBABLE ORDEAL--FROM OUT OF THE PAIN--FROM OUT OF THE AGONY--COMES TRIUMPH!
I DID IT! I'M FREE!

MARK EVANIER: SNAPSHOT OF A FAN

Photo of Mark Evanier today and Mark as drawn by Sergio Aragones in 1994.



By Bob Brodsky & Kevin Hanley

MARK EVANIER can't remember his first comic book. "As I recall, about four seconds after I was born, the doctor slapped me and I dropped a copy of *Little Lulu* I'd been reading in the womb," he says today.

Born at the dawn of the Silver Age, Evanier has spent his life immersed in comic books. When he was a teenager in the 1960s, Evanier's passion for comics drove him off the bedroom floor... away from his half-eaten apple and dog-eared copy of *Tales of Suspense*... and straight to the heart of early fandom. Evanier made a name for himself as a prolific letter writer and fanzine contributor. He originated the legendary "Marvelite Rankings" and by the decade's end was running Marvelmania, Marvel's official fan club.

In the early 1970s Evanier assisted Jack Kirby on his Fourth World titles at DC and began his own comic writing career in 1972. His drive and talent soon took him from the bright colors and fast jokes of Gold Key's *Looney Tunes* to the top tier of television writers. Today, he remains a prolific writer both in and out of comics.

ARAGONÉS

Mark Evanier

Evanier continues to be a highly visible figure in the world of comics. He has participated in every San Diego Comic Con and his influential Point of View column runs weekly in the *Comic Buyer's Guide*. He is an encyclopedia of comic book history, and a true advocate for the creative people behind the art form.

We spoke to Mark last November from his Los Angeles home. Our conversation focused on his important role in 1960's comic fandom as well as his professional comic book work of the early '70s. Evanier spoke with show biz brashness befitting a local L.A. kid, and a warm, often self-deprecating, sense of humor.

"I was born in 1952," Evanier says. "And I just grew up, to the extent I grew up at all, reading comic books. I read everything I could get my mitts on, comics included. My parents would buy me just about anything I wanted to read."

Evanier's early comic book collection consisted of lots of Disney, Warner Brothers and Harvey humor comics like *Uncle Scrooge* and *Richie Rich*. As a small child he would pile the books into a large box in his bedroom. He spent his time seated in the box pulling comic books up from underneath him and reading them. "Every so often I would get up and stir the box so that I would get the one's from the bottom to the top," he recalls.

By his seventh birthday Evanier had discovered superhero comics. He well remembers his first, *Action Comics* #250... "two issues before Supergirl debuted. There was a Superman story called 'The Eye of Metropolis' and the back-up story was Tommy Tomorrow, drawn by Jim Mooney who's become a good buddy of mine. The lead story was written by Bill Finger and drawn by Wayne Boring, neither of whom I ever really met. And there was a Congorilla story in there, too."

Soon Evanier traded in his humor comics to a second-hand bookstore for superhero titles. Needless to say, he has since spent a lot of time and money buying back the Carl Barks' comics of his childhood.

Evanier embraced adventure-type comics across the board. He read ACG and Charlton comics in addition to the better known DC and Marvel titles. When pressed, he admits a bias for DC Comics, particularly those edited by Julie Schwartz. Push him even further and he'll slyly confess that his all-time favorite comic title just might be a hold-over from his childhood, DC's *Fox and Crow*.

By his early teens, Evanier, no longer content with just reading comics, had become a letter column regular. "It was a very modest little way of connecting with the comic book business," he comments. "You have a letter printed and you suddenly feel you're a part of this month's Spider-Man."

Join The Club

Beginning with his first published missive in *Aquaman* #28 (August 1966), Evanier became an accomplished "letter hack." The practice of publishing full addresses, originated by Julie Schwartz in 1961 and soon copied by other editors, gave fans a way to contact each other. Evanier also began to receive fanzines, as amateur publishers took notice of his letter page contributions.

"I started corresponding with a lot of guys, one of whom was Tony Isabella. Then I started writing for fanzines and being involved in that," Evanier recalls.

"Mark and I," Isabella says today, "probably started writing to each other while we were both members of a thing called the Yancy Street Gang, which used to put out a fanzine called *The Yancy Street Gazette*. Mark was kind of the token DC fan of the *Gazette*, while I was a rabid Marvel fan. We just started exchanging letters and in a very short time we were both writing for every fanzine in sight."

In 1967, in a letter featured in the June edition of *Stan's Soapbox*, Evanier created "The Hallowed Ranks of Marveldom." His brilliant suggestion of granting Marvel readers titles like "RFO (Real Frantic One)" and "QNS (Quite 'Nuff Sayer)" further closed ranks among this tight-knit group of fans. While leaving nobody behind (an RFO bought just one Marvel comic), the rankings gave more seasoned fans something to shoot for (a QNS must have a letter published). Slightly abridged versions of Evanier's titles were carried on Marvel letter pages well into the early '70s.

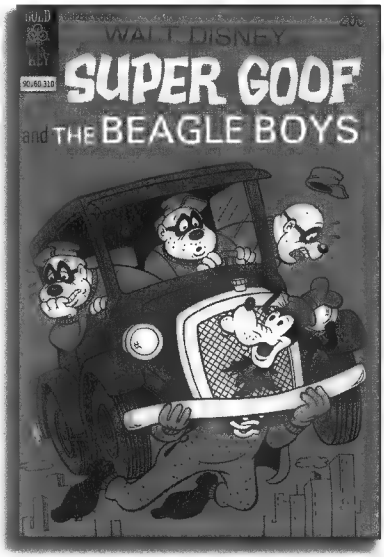
Mark's first published LOC (letter of comment) from Aquaman #28 (Aug 1966.)

* *

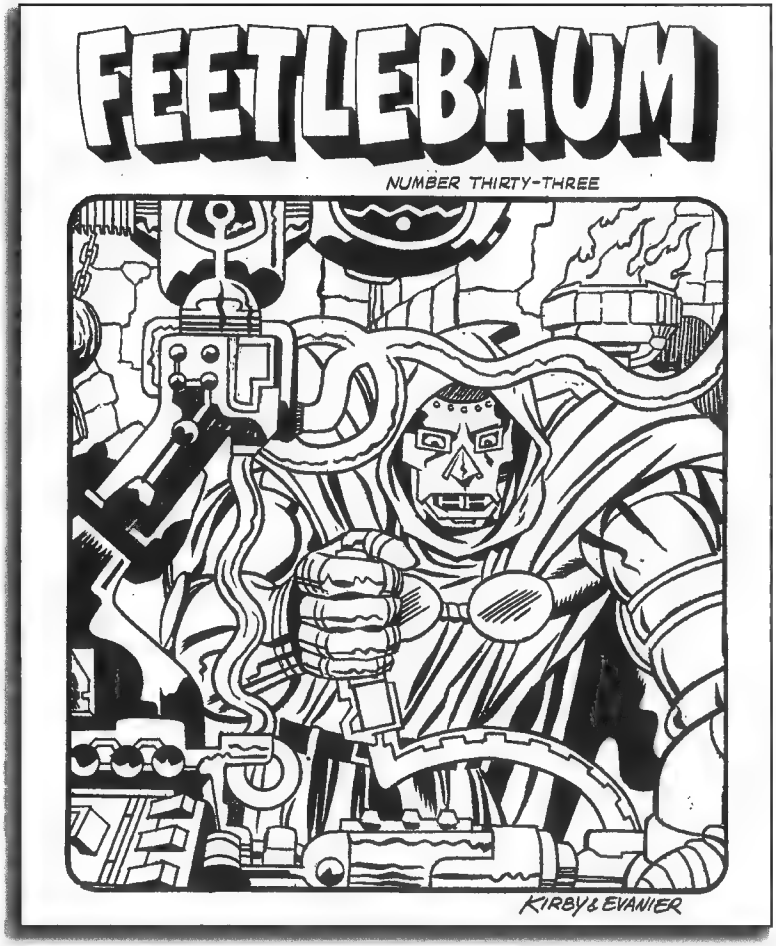
Dear Editor: On behalf of AQUAMAN fans everywhere, thank you! Thank you for the letter department, the excellent Bob Haney stories, the better-than-ever Nicholas Cardy artwork. One suggestion: two stories per issue would make AQUAMAN an even better magazine. —Mark Evanier, Los Angeles, Calif.

* * *

Blackbolt from Marvelmania Monthly Magazine #1 (Apr 1970). Art by Jack Kirby.



Super Goof #27 (Oct 1973) contained Mark's first American published comic book script. Art by Kay Wright.



Dr. Doom from Feetlebaum #33 (1983). Pencils by Jack Kirby, inks by Mark Evanier. Feetlebaum was a self-published Evanier Fanzine... The title comes from Spike Jones.

If there were a hall of fame for LOC correspondents, Evanier's creation of the Hallowed Ranks of Marveldom would be reason enough for his induction alongside other greats from the '60s like Martin "Pesky" Pasko, Irene Vartanoff, and "Our Favorite Guy" H. Lillian III.

Also in 1967, Evanier's local fan friendships coalesced into a bona fide organization: The Los Angeles Comic Book Club. The club was a freewheeling group of about 30 members who met every Saturday at a West Los Angeles community center to talk and trade comics. "The Comic Club is where my interest in comics really kicked in," Evanier says. "It was fun to be around people who could talk about who the best inker for Jack Kirby was."

The club's strictest rule was that the members were not allowed to discuss who started the club. "About eight different guys had their version of how they started the club, and fistfights could erupt," Evanier recalls with laughter "At the first organizational meeting, I was the only one present who wasn't claiming that honor, so they made me president. Also, I'd had all those letters printed and I guess they thought that meant I outranked a fan who didn't turn up often in Flash-Grams."

Fellow comic club member Steve Sherman recalls the roots of West Coast comic fandom: "It really got started because of the *Batman* TV show," Sherman says. "Then they did a television special on a local channel here with Gary Owens. Owens showed some clips from old serials, and then he went and showed some of the comic book shops that used to be on Hollywood Boulevard." Suddenly kids who read comics began to search out other local fans. The camaraderie of the club helped to bridge the distance between the New York publishers and these West Coast fans.

"Being on the West Coast, we were so far removed from the comic book business, it was like studying Saturn. None of us thought we'd ever touch the business, let alone work in it," adds Evanier. He remembers receiving a letter from Steve Ditko that was loudly dismissed as a forgery by other club members. "The general reaction was like I was claiming a fictional character had sent me a Candygram. It seemed outside the realm of human possibility that one could actually get a letter from Steve Ditko."

Marvelous Marvelmania

The L.A. Comic Club faded from the scene in 1969 as Evanier and his fellow members went to work for Marvel Comics' official fan club, Marvelmania International. The organization was conceived by a Los Angeles businessman who had sold Marvel on the idea of a West Coast based successor to the Merry Marvel Marching Society.

Mark Evanier

The always-energetic Evanier was the first to hear about Marvelmania. "He went over there and talked to the guy who was setting it up," Sherman remembers. "The guy knew nothing about comic books, and Mark knew everything. So then Mark came back to the club and told us 'Hey, Marvelmania is, like, down the street.'"

"When Marvelmania was getting started the fellow who ran the place hired me to edit the club magazine and Steve Sherman as production supervisor," Evanier says.

"I think it was a question that he didn't know much about Marvel Comics and I walked in the door one day and I did. He needed somebody in the building that could tell the difference between Dr. Strange and Dr. Doom. And, I had created the Ranks of Marveldom!"

Soon Stan Lee himself was chatting up Evanier and Sherman as a "couple of young, zingy, with-it guys" in an item in Marvel Bullpen Bulletins. Their Marvelmania jobs sounded more glamorous than they actually were.

Operating out of a West Los Angeles storefront, Evanier and Sherman worked hard at editorial and production chores. The other club members' duties included rolling Jack Kirby superhero posters, and shipping out decals, catalogs and other Marvel merchandise.

Unfortunately, the businessman soon disappeared with company funds and by late 1970 Marvelmania was dead. Evanier and Sherman quit the organization long before the theft because they had come to realize that their boss could not be trusted. Prior to the crime, the pair alerted Marvel and everyone they knew who was doing business with him, of their suspicions.

PHOTOGRAPH BY SAM MARONIE

Mark and Joe Sinnott at the 1975 New York Comic Art Convention.

Working with Jack

With Jack Kirby's move to Southern California in early 1969, the West Coast at last became home to a major East Coast comic book professional. As might be expected, Evanier was quick to make contact with Kirby. Their relationship expanded with Evanier's involvement at Marvelmania.

Kirby's frustration with his situation at Marvel has been well documented. Suffice to say that by the summer of 1970 he had decided to leave the company he helped create and move to DC. Kirby asked Evanier and Sherman to come with him as his assistants.

Kirby set up shop at his Thousand Oaks home and quickly went to work creating some of the most important comic books of all time: his immortal Fourth World series of *Jimmy Olsen, Forever People, New Gods,* and *Mister Miracle.* Evanier and Sherman handled the letter pages for the King's three new titles, and served as youthful sounding boards for his ideas.

In addition to the substantial creative experience, Jack and his wife Roz became something of a second family for the two young men. Evanier and the Kirby's friendship only deepened over the years.

Another product of Evanier's association with Jack Kirby, has been his involvement with the San Diego Comic Con.

Shel Dorf, the convention's founder, recalls a summer evening at Jack Kirby's home in 1969. Dorf had come to Kirby to pitch the idea of a West Coast comic convention. Kirby told Dorf that there was one guy he had to meet, a real go-getter named Mark Evanier. Evanier played an important part in drawing Los Angeles fans to the early San Diego conventions, and has gone on to become a popular panel moderator and speaker.

"There are so many interesting people at the San Diego Convention," Evanier comments. "One of the things I find fascinating about it is that the hall is filled with people who, though they might not be Guests of Honor or celebrities, represent important facets of comic book history. You never know when an important, perhaps unheralded name, will leap right off a name badge at you."

Evanier has attended every single San Diego convention. Perhaps that is because he so effortlessly combines the spirit of a fan with the skill of a professional.

By late 1972, *Forever People* and *New Gods* had been canceled, and Kirby had been taken off *Jimmy Olsen*. Only *Mister Miracle* remained and largely without the grand trappings of the Fourth World saga. Though certainly more than adequate, Kirby's replacement titles *Kamandi* and *The Demon* lacked the grandeur of the earlier works. For Evanier it was time to move on.

In 1971, Mike Royer recommended Evanier for a job writing Disney comics for foreign distribution. A year later, Evanier's prolific output and Disney connection landed him a job with Gold Key Comics. "I was writing six or eight comics a month for Gold Key. *Bugs Bunny, Daffy Duck, Porky Pig, the Road Runner, Looney Tunes, Woody Woodpecker, Scooby-Doo*. It was a good training ground. I enjoyed doing those tremendously." Evanier the writer had returned to the humor books of his childhood.

Another kind of comic

By the mid 1970s Evanier had begun to actively pursue writing assignments outside of comics.

He began hanging around the Comedy Store in Hollywood writing material for standup comedians. Evanier's love of comedy was nothing new. Shel Dorf remembers being amazed by the number of books on classic comedians the seventeen-year-old fan had on his shelf. Steve Sherman recalls watching *The Tonight Show,* with Mark usually beating Johnny Carson to the punch line.

In 1976, Evanier began the all-consuming task of writing and story editing the popular *Welcome Back, Kotter* television show. Since then he has written for a number of live action TV shows including *That's Incredible*, *The Richard Pryor Show* and *The Love Boat*. Other television credits include situation comedies for McLean Stevenson, Bob Newhart and Nancy Walker.

For seven seasons, beginning in 1987, Evanier was the chief writer and voice director for the highly successful *Garfield and Friends* animated series. He has been writing for cartoon shows since 1978, including a couple of episodes of Fox's animated Superman show, and has just completed writing, editing and voice directing *Channel Umptee 3* for the Kids WB Network.

Often lost among his better known writing assignments, are Evanier's extensive post 1970's comic book credentials.

After the Bronze Age

In 1982 Evanier stepped into the spotlight with his now mature comic scripting. He wrote, and later edited, a revival of DC's Blackhawk with veteran artist Dan Speigle. Though published under duress by DC (Steven Speilberg held the movie rights and DC wanted to keep possible avenues of exploitation open), Evanier's Blackhawk excited fans. Evanier and Spiegle captured the original excitement of DC's Silver Age war books at the exact moment war comics were dying out.

When comics exploded with the rise of the independents in the 1980s, Evanier was there as well, contributing two of the best titles of the '80s: *DNAgents* and its exciting spin-off, *Crossfire*, for Eclipse Comics. Evanier, in fact considers *Crossfire* to be perhaps the highlight of his comic scripting "Go dig out the first twenty or so issues of Crossfire, if you don't like those, you won't like anything else I've ever written," he says today.

Beginning in 1984, Evanier has also scripted over 130 stories for Sergio Aragones' *Groo the Wanderer.* Originally drawn by Aragones utilizing a pantomime storytelling technique, Evanier has added his renowned verbal wit to the humorous tales of the bumbling swordsman.

Evanier's work on *Groo* has also been a reflection of his advocacy on behalf of comic book creators. Groo originally appeared in *Destroyer Duck* #1, a benefit comic produced to support Steve Gerber's lawsuit with Marvel over *Howard the Duck.* Evanier was invited aboard by Aragones to "...be funny verbally the way Aragones is funny visually," and to handle the editorial end of publishing a regular *Groo* comic. From the beginning, Aragones and Evanier have maintained complete editorial control, regardless of the publisher.

In contrast to television, Evanier enjoys the intimate relationship to the finished product that comics provide. "Of all the things I fool people into letting me write, I enjoy comic books the most," Evanier maintains today. "When you write a TV show, you have a couple hundred people between you and the audience. When we do an issue of *Groo,* it's just Sergio, Stan (Sakai), Tom (Luth) and me."

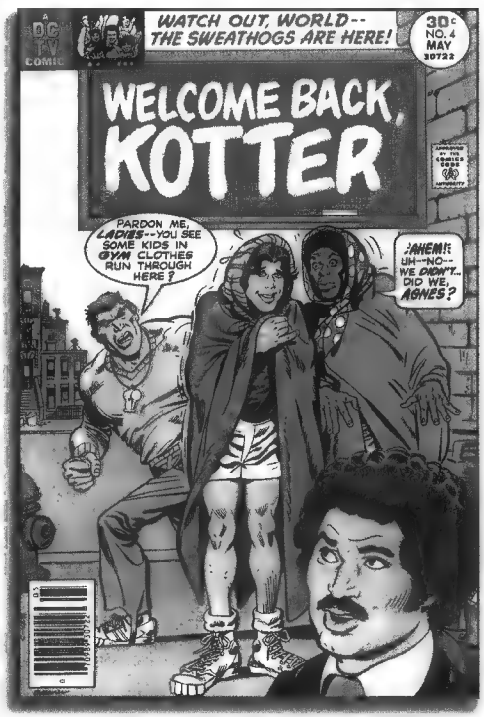
Evanier is of course visible to comic book fans every week with his Point of View column in *Comic Buyer's Guide.* Whether the subject is Stan Laurel or Stan Lee, Evanier is always an enjoyable read. Though the column covers a wide array of subjects, he is at his best when discussing comic book history.

Though Jack Kirby died in 1994, Evanier continues to champion his legacy. Mark is currently writing what he hopes will be the definitive biography of Jack. A Kirby tribute book co-produced with Frank Miller has been in the works for sometime.

He continues to correspond with *CBM* and other comic book oriented publications. Mark is the guy who'll clarify that while *Fantastic Four* #6 was mainly inked by Dick Ayers, there were a few panels inked by Joe Sinnott.

"Mark is still a fan," Steve Sherman says. "He still loves to read and talk about comics. He's a really nice guy who's always been there whenever anybody needed help or had a question."

Mark Evanier turned his hobby into a career, but never lost the hobby.



Welcome Back, Kotter #4 (May 1977) contained Mark's first published Kotter script. Art by Bob Oksner.

Bob Brodsky is a stock broker in Los Angeles and specializes in comics published from 1967-73. His personal mission is to bring attention to other unsung heroes.
Bob would like to dedicate this article to the memory of Archie Goodwin.

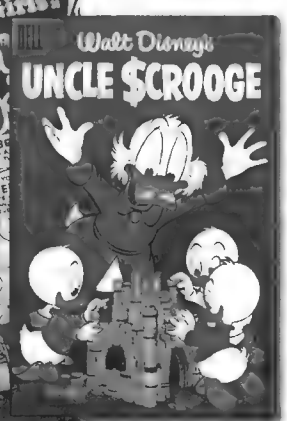
THE ODYSSEY OF A SYN

BY STEVE COOPER

CHRONIC COLLECTOR

Most hobbyists acquire by title, character, artist, and company. Yet one avid collector took a different approach to collecting… attempting the prodigious task of amassing every comic book that graced the newsstand during one specific month at the dawn of the Silver Age!

Synchronic Collector



PHOTOGRAPH CREDIT: STEVE COOPER & LUCIEN FLOTTE

ON A CRISP WINTER EVENING IN 1956, it happened to me. I was on a New York City bus speeding down Sixth Avenue, slumped down near an open window with my knees braced up against the seat in front of me, the wind slapping me in the face, my innocent 11-year-old mind completely absorbed inside the latest issue of my favorite science fiction comic magazine. I was reading a story about a guy who was getting larger and larger, and still larger, until he grew so incredibly colossal that the enormous planets of the solar system simply passed through him. What? My pea-sized brain struggled with this cosmic-sized vision. I put up some rational resistance, but finally my imagination surrendered and the concept of atomic expansion on such an enormous scale broke through. This fantastic idea permanently blew my mind and I was never to be the same little boy again.

Thirty years later I became a comic book collector, and having kept the memory of that boyhood epiphany, I considered making an effort to find the exact science-fiction story that had inflamed my imagination. But I despaired of trying because my comic reading years stretched over six years and the search would require me to find hundreds of comics. It hardly helped that I knew the story was in a fantasy or science fiction comic because I used to read so many of them, including the DC titles *Mystery In Space, House of Mystery, Tales of the Unexpected, Strange Adventures* and the ACG titles *Adventures into the Unknown* and *Forbidden Worlds*. Stories about guys getting larger, or smaller, were recurrent themes in all of those titles, indeed even in such classical literature as Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*. So even though I occasionally came upon stories about guys getting larger, the actual panel that was indelibly imprinted on my mind, with the image of planets passing through the hero, eluded me.

One day, browsing a box at a con, I came upon *Strange Adventures* #230, a "Gigantic" 64-page compilation of seven reprints from past issues of *Strange Adventures* and *Mystery In*

The author's first MAD and the Strange Adv. containing the reprint of his most memorable story.

Space. I bought it without even looking inside because I collect moon trip material and the cover story was "Secret of the Moon Sphinx." Later, after I got it home, I started going through the book with mildly trembling hands, very slightly hoping beyond hope, when suddenly there it was, the unforgettable panel of the colossal guy who had become so stretched out that planets passed through him. The story, "Search for a Lost World," having been reprinted in the more fan-accommodating year of 1971, now included the credits, which rarely appeared back in the mid-'50s. The story was by Edmond Hamilton, with art by Sid Greene and Joe Giella. But most propitiously for me, at the end of the reprint, the editors were thoughtful enough to add the information that the story was originally published in *Strange Adventures* #67, April 1956. Although I did not immediately realize it, this date was to become my mantra for the next ten years.

Some time later, knowing that *Strange Adventures* #67 had been at the top of my want list for months, a friend came back from the San Diego Con with a VF copy for me. Holding this crisp high-grade copy in my hands, the cover sizzling with brilliant yellows, reds and oranges, gave me an exquisite thrill of nostalgia and connection. I felt totally satisfied that my quest had reached a successful conclusion. But even as something had ended, something else had instantly started. My collector fires were sparked into a blazing inferno; owning just this one, solitary, lonely April '56 book was quite insufficient.

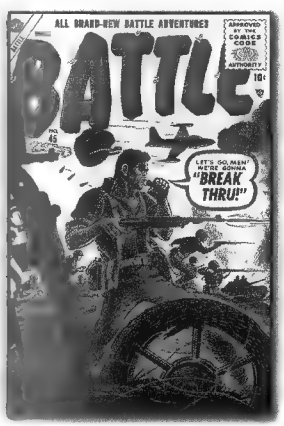
How could I stop now? It was obvious to me that the inevitable continuation of the project was to have them all! Yes, I had to have all the comics that were on the newsstand that exact time; that exact year, that exact month. Not just the ones I read, but the entire array, every single title, in order to fully recapture and explore the comic book Zeitgeist of that momentous day in my life!

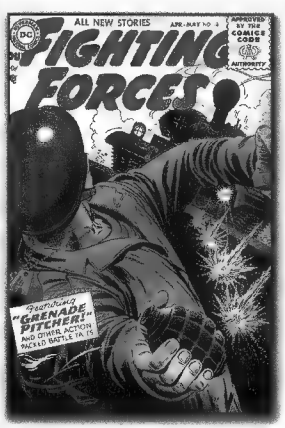
What I decided to label a "synchronic collection" had appeal as a challenging educational project, one that would give me an overview of the history of comics that collecting a single title run would not come close to providing. I was stimulated by the sensibility that this newly defined collection wouldn't have the same old flavor of cult fanaticism attached to obsessively collecting a single title; here was a refreshing alternative to the single-mindedness of merely seeking one number after another of a particular title. (Not that there is anything wrong with that! I love my complete collection of *MAD*.) But a synchronic collection had authentic academic value insofar as it encompassed an entire niche of anthropological study.

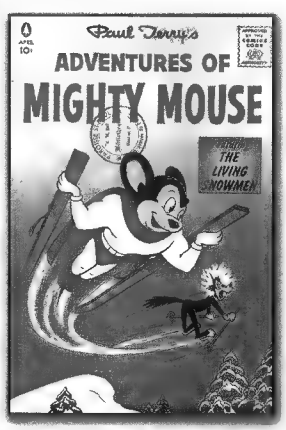
And it was patriotic too! After all, it was utterly democratic in that no title would be discriminated against; all titles and all genres were equally important, with no favorites. The collection would not be based on the popularity of a character, not on the artists, and not on the covers being colorful, artistic or historically significant. I would be forced to look for titles I never even knew existed… and had previously cared nothing about. I would be forced to collect books regardless of their cost, content, and quality… and to acquire them simply because of their intrinsic interest to me. No matter whatever else could be considered, I still had to have them all.

Because of the depth and nature of this collection, I fanta-

Synchronic collection members… Walt Disney's Uncle Scrooge #13, Hi-School Romance #50, Battle #45, Nancy and Sluggo #131, Our Fighting Forces #10, and Adv. of Mighty Mouse #129.







sized that eventually it could be donated to the library of my alma mater and preserved intact, under archival conditions, as The Steve Cooper Synchronic Collection of Comic Books–April, 1956, for students to study into the next century. Such a worthy goal!

Thus was born the idea for my synchronic collection, and little did I comprehend what I was getting into. This project has included many intricate decisions and physical difficulties, and called for all of my technical and human resources for more than ten years. But I am happy to report that I also did not anticipate the marvelously varied and entertaining rewards that have made it all worth the effort.

CHOOSING A TARGET DATE

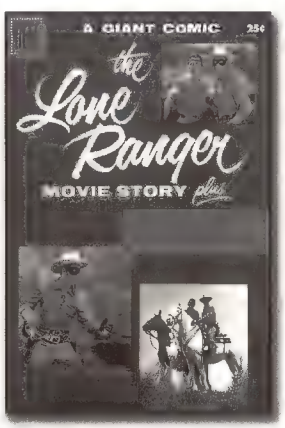
Compared to the concept of a chronologic collection of a specific title the synchronic endeavor is vastly more complicated. To begin with, unless you have unlimited funds to finance the acquisitions, the target date cannot be casually chosen. There are mitigating factors that must be used to narrow the range, to accommodate specific collector needs and capabilities. Certainly the collector's enthusiasm must be sustained during the exhaustive effort required to amass an accurate set of books, and the collection must eventually provide a decent payoff towards the collector's specific interests. Although people often guess that my collection is based on my birth date, it seems to me that by using your own birth date you would miss the opportunity to use a later date from your life that has actual reminiscent potential for you, a date with some energy of real recollection and nostalgic pleasure.

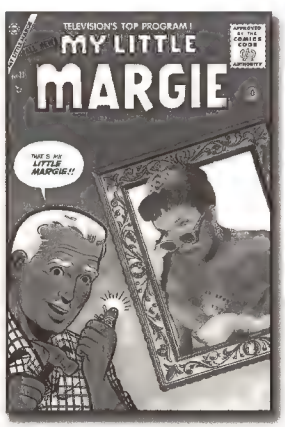
Synchronic collection members... Tomahawk #39, Lone Ranger Movie Story #1, Combat Kelly #36, and My Little Margie #11.

My synchronic collection was based on a random date, not predicated on anything more significant than the date of a story I never forgot. I liked the idea that using a random date, and avoiding the use of a calculated, predetermined date, would maximize the thrill of any fortuitous discoveries. I was also inspired by the opportunity to demonstrate the intellectual point that any moment was as important as any other, if only it was examined deeply enough. I intuitively trusted that an accumulation of books from a random moment, uncontaminated with expectations, would definitely include all of the mainstream titles as well as a plethora of exciting esoteric goodies. Early on, tired of giving the lengthy "story-I-never-forgot" explanation for my use of April, 1956, I was tempted to move the target date forward just a few months, to September of 1956, so that I could conveniently explain the chosen date by saying it was *Showcase* #4, the book often used to define the dawn of the Silver Age of comics. But I resisted, I kept the faith that a truly random synchronic collection would be like a bolt of lightning streaking down to illuminate a sliver of historic reality, revealing all: the universe in a grain of sand.

Albeit, a target date might arise from many possible associations, and a collector embarking on a synchronic voyage would certainly be justified in using his or her own birth date, or any number of other possible dates for various reasons. For example, consider the chart of genre market share in the *Gerber's Photo-Journal Guide to Comic Books* (Vol. 2, Pg. C-12). If a collector was interested in superhero books, it is clear that the early '40s was the period when superheroes dominated the market, and therefore choosing a target date from that era would be appropriate. Of course, a budgetary consideration would immediately arise, insofar as collecting books from that early period would be relatively expensive. And while you've got your *Gerber's Photo-Journal* open, it might also be useful to examine the chart of percentage of market share per category (Vol. 2, Pg. C-10), which lists the total number of titles for any given year and thereby shows the depth of the sea in which one might choose to swim.

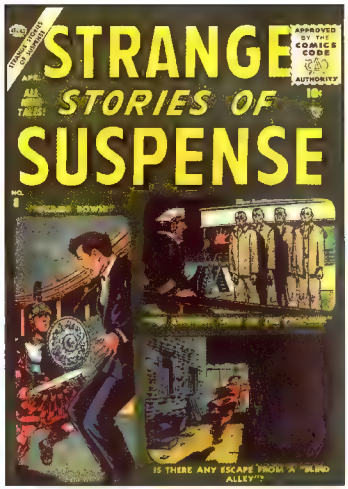
For example, the chart shows there were an astounding 643 titles for the year 1952, the peak year in the history of comics. That would be an awful lot of books to find, but fortunately for any given month the books needed would include fewer than Gerber's totals because many titles quickly came and went during any given year. In my own case, a grand total of 406 titles are listed for the entire year of 1956, but I developed a list with only 220 titles for the March/April window. Indeed, 220 make

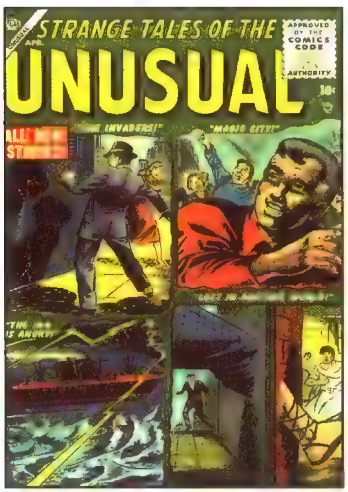


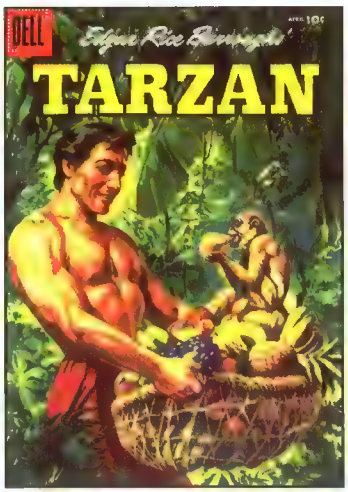


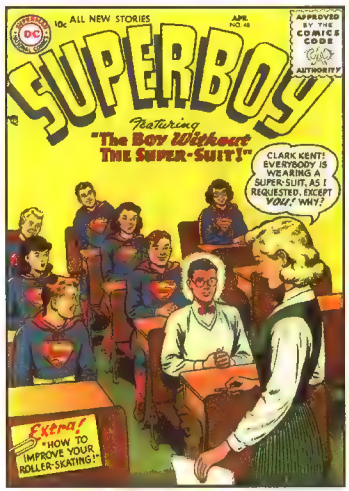
ACTION COMICS
SUPERMAN TRAVELS 1,000 YEARS INTO THE FUTURE TO TEAM UP WITH...
The SUPERMAN of TOMORROW!
THAT ROCKET SHIP'S ABOUT TO CRASH! I'D BETTER SWITCH FROM CLARK KENT TO SUPERMAN!
AND I'LL CHANGE FROM CRAIG KING TO THE SUPERMAN OF 2958, AND JOIN YOU!

SPACE ADVENTURES
FIRST TRIP TO THE MOON
IN this day of wondrous science, we have jet planes that exceed the speed of fleet sound itself! We have rockets that pierce the sky for hundreds of miles! And we have atomic energy at our fingertips. A giant of power!
But what is in store for mankind tomorrow? Will he soon soar away from Earth into the limitless reaches of outer space? Four courageous men attempt to answer this thrilling question as they blaze an interplanetary trail, rocketing into the unknown on the FIRST TRIP TO THE MOON

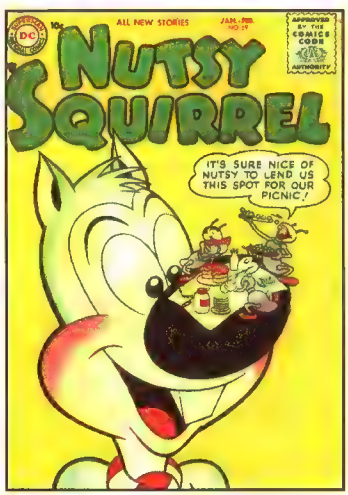

STRANGE STORIES OF SUSPENSE
IS THERE ANY ESCAPE FROM A "BLIND ALLEY"?

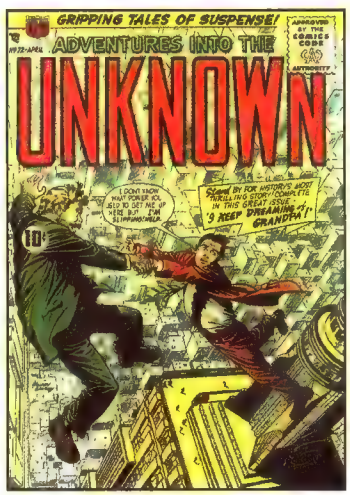

STRANGE TALES OF THE UNUSUAL
"INVADERS!"
"MAGIC CITY!"


DELL
Edgar Rice Burroughs'
TARZAN

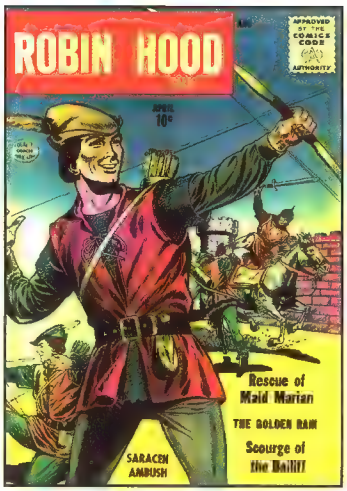

SUPERBOY
Featuring
"The Boy Without THE SUPER-SUIT!"
CLARK KENT? EVERYBODY IS WEARING A SUPER-SUIT, AS I REQUESTED, EXCEPT YOU! WHY?
Extra!
"HOW TO IMPROVE YOUR ROLLER-SKATING!"

WORLD'S FINEST
The TRUE HISTORY of SUPERMAN and BATMAN
I, KA-THAR, OF 5958, HAVE THE WHOLE TRUTH ABOUT YOU IN THIS BOOK--INCLUDING YOUR SECRET IDENTITIES--CLARK KENT, BRUCE WAYNE, DICK GRAYSON!


NUTSY SQUIRREL
IT'S SURE NICE OF NUTSY TO LEND US THIS SPOT FOR OUR PICNIC!


GRIPPING TALES OF SUSPENSE!
ADVENTURES INTO THE UNKNOWN
Stand by for HISTORY'S MOST THRILLING STORY! COMPLETE IN THIS GREAT ISSUE!
"I KEEP DREAMING IT!"
GRANDPA!
10¢

ARMY at WAR
WOLF—JUMPING YOU AT 2 O'CLOCK, FOX FIVE—DIVE!
LET HIM SCRATCH—I'M BUSY!
Featuring "DIARY OF G. FIGHTING PILOT!"
AND OTHER EXPLOSIVE BATTLE-ACTION STORIES!

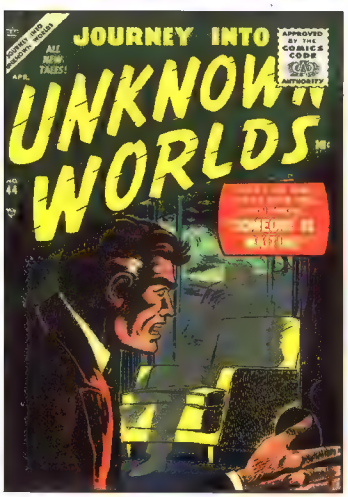

ROBIN HOOD
Rescue of Maid Marian
THE GOLDEN RAM
Scourge of the Bailiff
SARACEN AMBUSH

BRAND-NEW MARVEL TALES!
MARVEL TALES
THE MACHINE THAT RULED!
PHILANDER'S LAST PERFORMANCE!
NO TURNING BACK!

NEW AND DIFFERENT
STRANGE SUSPENSE STORIES
I'VE BEEN WAITING 300 YEARS FOR THIS MOMENT! CHOOSE YOUR WEAPON!

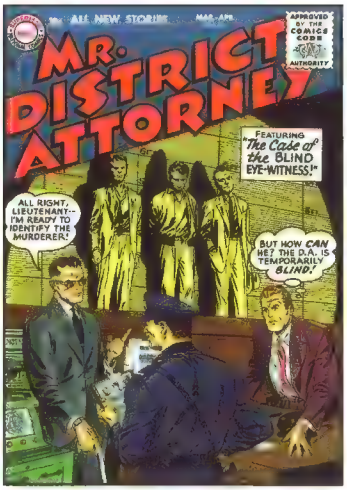
ALL NEW STORIES STARRING THE WORLD'S GREATEST ADVENTURE CHARACTER!
SUPERMAN
Featuring "The SUPER-FAMILY from OUT OF SPACE!"
THIS CLARK KENT-SUPERMAN MUST BE ONE OF OUR OWN PEOPLE! WE SHALL GO TO EARTH AND PAY HIM A VISIT!

TIP TOP COMICS
WHAT HAPPENED ?
I WAS USING QUICK DRYING PAINT !!

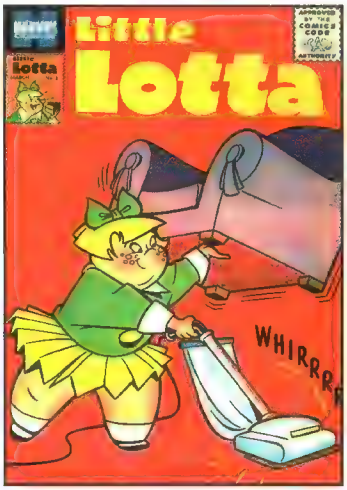

JOURNEY INTO UNKNOWN WORLDS

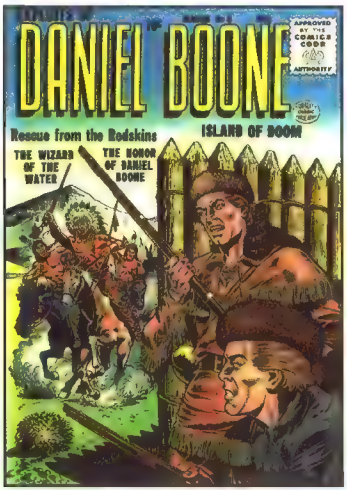
TRUE LOVE
TRUE Bride-To-Be ROMANCES
THIS WAS MAMA'S HOME MAMA'S GARDEN, MAMA'S PORCH. EVEN THE MAN I WAS COMING TO MARRY WAS MAMA'S CHOICE

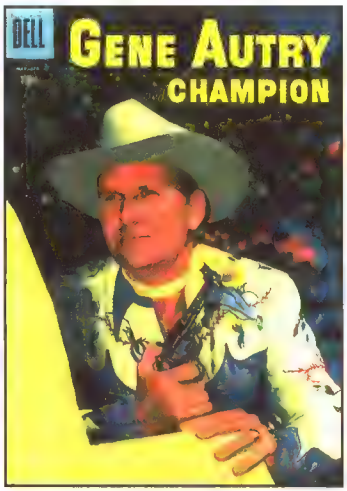
Wonder Woman
SHADES OF PLUTO! IS THIS TRAIN REAL—OR AM I HAVING ANOTHER NIGHTMARE?!?
THE ASTONISHING ANSWER TO WONDER WOMAN'S DILEMMA IS REVEALED IN . . . "THE DREAM BOGGIES!"

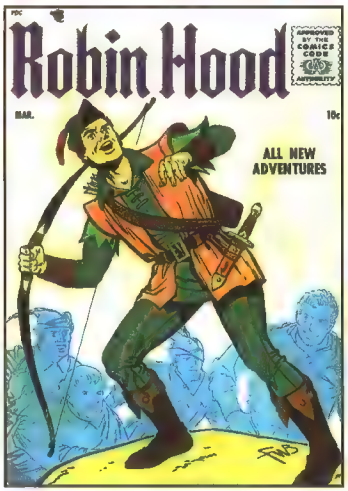

ALL NEW STORIES
MAR.-APR.
MR. DISTRICT ATTORNEY
APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY
FEATURING "The Case of the BLIND EYE-WITNESS!"
ALL RIGHT, LIEUTENANT—I'M READY TO IDENTIFY THE MURDERER!
BUT HOW CAN HE? THE D.A. IS TEMPORARILY BLIND!

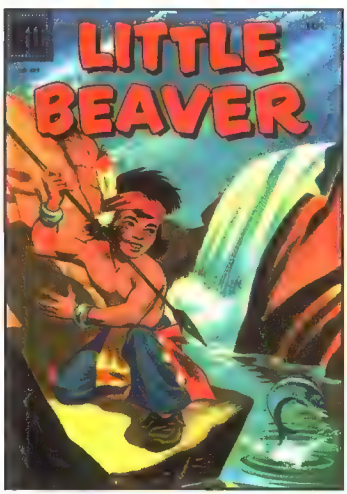
MYSTERIOUS PSYCHIC REVELATIONS
ALL NEW
ZAZA
THE MYSTIC
10¢
APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY

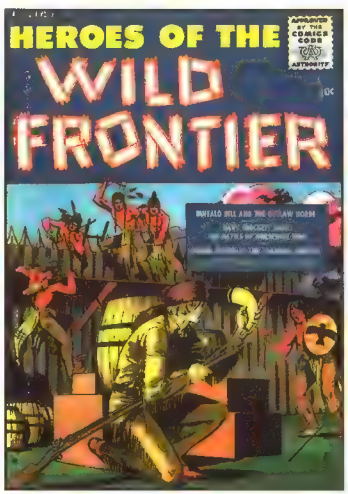

Little Lotta
WHIRRR


DANIEL BOONE
APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY
Rescue from the Redskins
ISLAND OF DOOM
THE WIZARD OF THE WATER
THE HONOR OF DANIEL BOONE


DELL
GENE AUTRY
CHAMPION

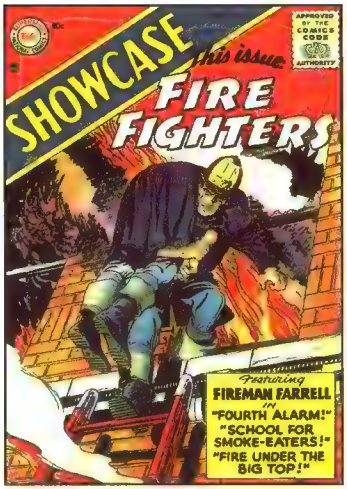

DC
Robin Hood
MAR.
10¢
ALL NEW ADVENTURES


LITTLE BEAVER


HEROES OF THE
WILD FRONTIER
APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY

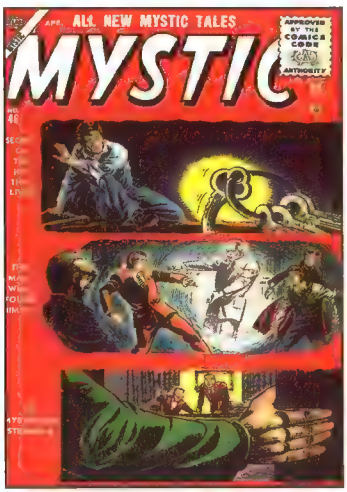
STRAIGHT ARROW
APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY
STRAIGHT ARROW
NO. 55

ALL NEW STORIES
ALL STAR WESTERN
HOW PEACEFUL AND QUIET IT IS -- EVER SINCE I BECAME INDIAN SHERIFF OF MESA CITY!
HOW LONG CAN JOHNNY THUNDER BATTLE BEHIND THE SCENES TO HELP THE INDIAN BOY SHERIFF WITHOUT HIS KNOWING IT?

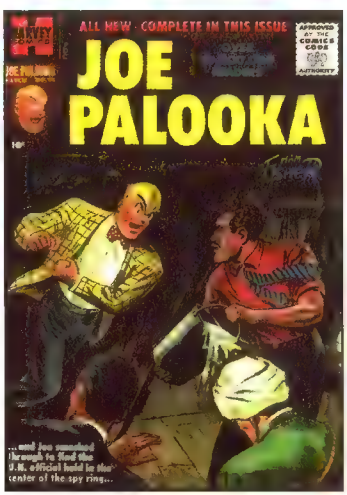

SHOWCASE
this issue
FIRE FIGHTERS
Featuring
FIREMAN FARRELL
in
"FOURTH ALARM!"
"SCHOOL FOR SMOKE-EATERS!"
"FIRE UNDER THE BIG TOP!"

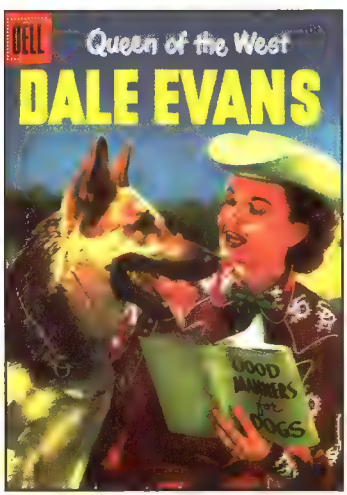
FUN AROUND THE CLOCK
It's GAME TIME
GAMES • RIDDLES • PUZZLES
SCRAMBLED SQUARES • DOTTO ZOO

STORIES of STRANGE ADVENTURE
FORBIDDEN WORLDS
MR. MEGGS the MERCURY!
BY THE STRANGE POWERS VESTED IN ME BACK!
WHAT--


ALL NEW MYSTIC TALES
MYSTIC

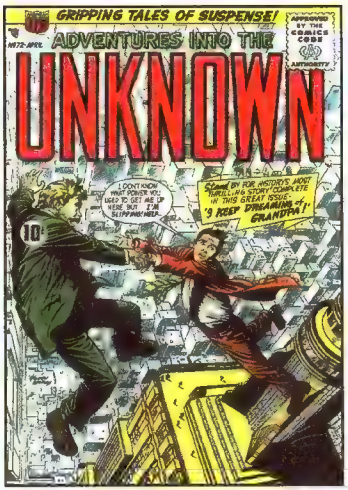
PLASTIC MAN
KING OF THE THUNDERBOLTS

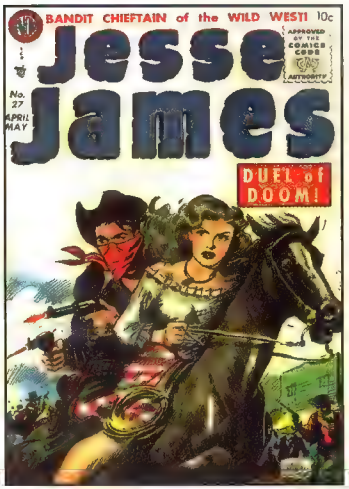

ALL NEW - COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE
JOE PALOOKA

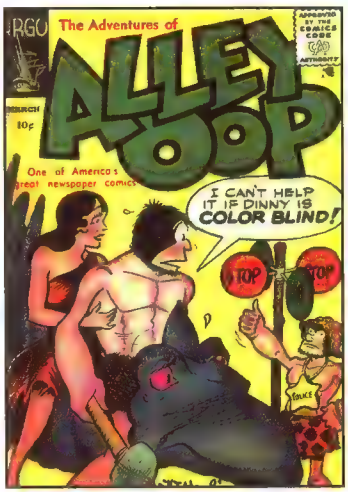

Queen of the West
DALE EVANS
GOOD MANNERS for DOGS

JOURNEY INTO MYSTERY

IS IT BETTER TO HAVE LOVED AND LOST---
THAN NEVER TO HAVE LOVED AT ALL ?
FIRST
Romance
RICH OR POOR, HE WAS MINE, AND...
I'd Never Let Him Go!

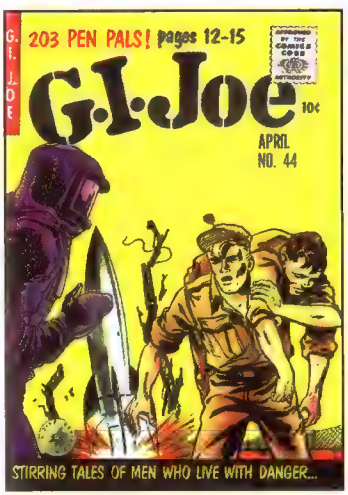

GRIPPING TALES OF SUSPENSE!
ADVENTURES INTO THE
UNKNOWN
10¢

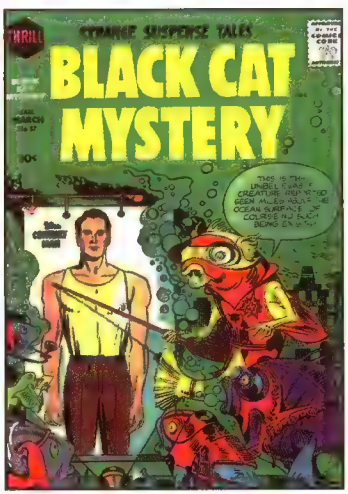

BANDIT CHIEFTAIN of the WILD WEST! 10c
Jesse James
No. 27
APRIL MAY
DUEL of DOOM!

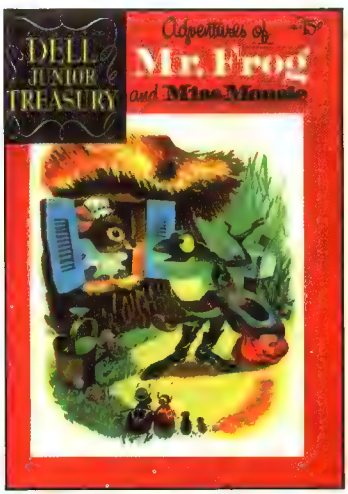

The Adventures of
ALLEY OOP
One of America's great newspaper comics
I CAN'T HELP IT IF DINNY IS COLOR BLIND!
STOP
STOP

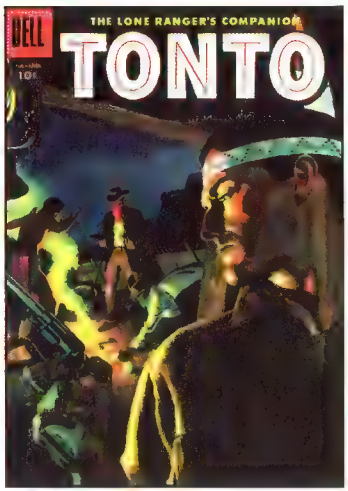
LITTLE WISE GUYS
starring in
DARE-DEVIL
10¢
NO.131 MARCH
LEV GLEASON, PUBLISHER · PRODUCED BY CHARLES BIRO
YOU'LL CHILL WITH THRILLS! YOU'LL ROAR WITH LAUGHTER! GUARANTEED TO KEEP YOU GUESSING TILL THE VERY END!
I BACKED INTO SOMETHING!
IT FEELS YOUNG... IT'S ALIVE!
IT'S GOT ME--EEK!
IT WAS TEN FEET HIGH AN' HAD POINTED TEETH!
IT GRABBED ME FROM BEHIND!
YOU DON'T SAY!

Little Archie
10¢
DO NOT PICK THE FLOWERS

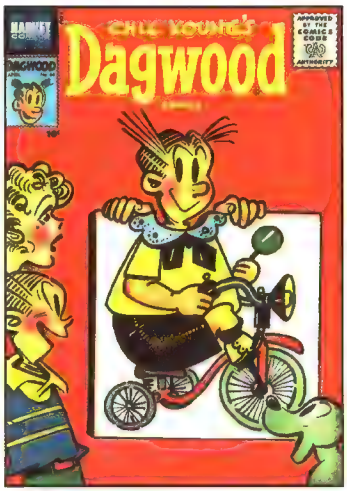

203 PEN PALS! pages 12-15
G.I. JOE
G.I. Joe
10¢
APRIL
NO. 44
STIRRING TALES OF MEN WHO LIVE WITH DANGER...


THRILL
STRANGE SUSPENSE TALES
BLACK CAT
MYSTERY

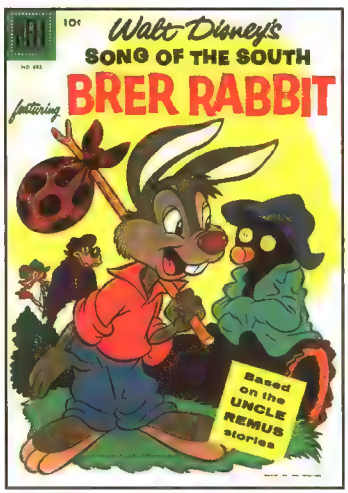

DELL
JUNIOR
TREASURY
Adventures of
Mr. Frog
and Mine Mouse

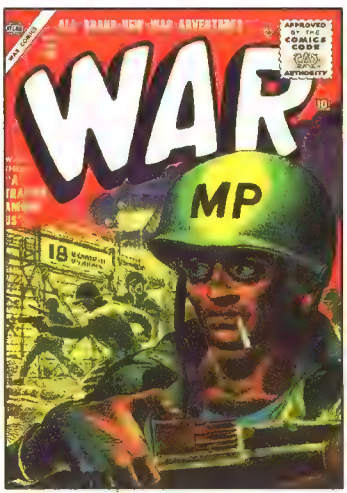

THE LONE RANGER'S COMPANION
TONTO

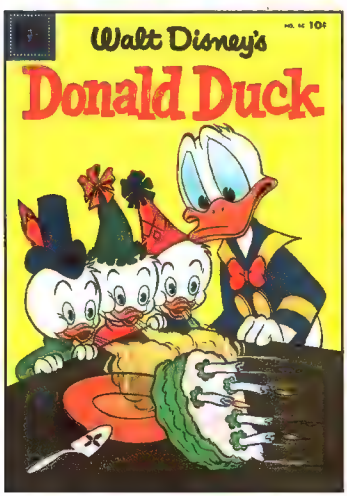
ALL NEW STORIES
Detective COMICS
Featuring The MAD HATTER of GOTHAM CITY!
NOW I CAN ADD BATMAN'S COWL TO MY COLLECTION OF HATS!
RESERVED FOR BATMAN
ONCE HE SEES MY FACE, THAT'S THE END OF MY CAREER!


CHIC YOUNG'S
Dagwood

KID COLT
BILLY BUCKSKIN
GUNSMOKE WESTERN
KID COLT
"BADMAN'S BLUFF"
BILLY BUCKSKIN RIDES AGAIN


Walt Disney's
SONG OF THE SOUTH
featuring
BRER RABBIT
Based on the UNCLE REMUS stories

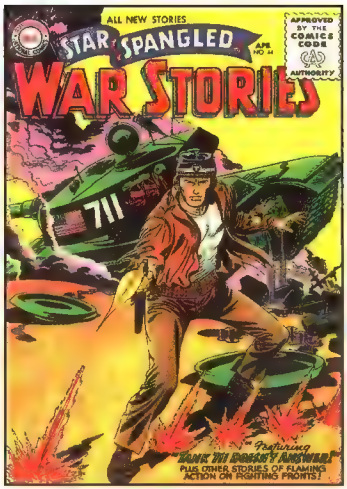

WAR
MP


Walt Disney's
Donald Duck

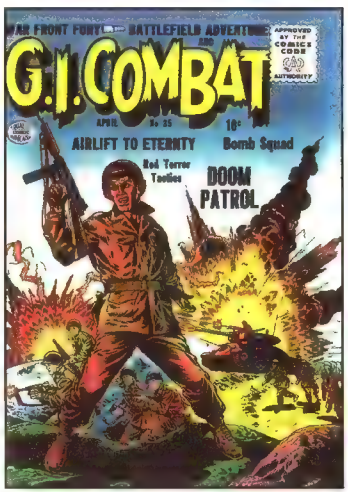
BREATHTAKING ACTION STORIES
Fightin' ARMY

ALL NEW STORIES
MYSTERY IN SPACE
Featuring "The DAY THE EARTH SPLIT IN TWO!"
LOOK—THERE'S OUR DESTINATION—EARTH! BUT ONE HALF HAS BEEN SLICED AWAY—AS THOUGH BY SOME GIANT BLADE!

ALL NEW STORIES
BAT MAN
featuring the PHANTOM of the BAT-CAVE!
ROBIN! SOMEBODY'S BEEN IN THE BAT-CAVE AGAIN AND STOLEN ANOTHER ONE OF OUR TROPHIES!
THEN HE MUST KNOW OUR SECRET IDENTITIES!


ALL NEW STORIES
STAR SPANGLED WAR STORIES
711
featuring "TANK TO BOOBY'S ANCHAGE!"
PLUS OTHER STORIES OF FLAMING ACTION ON FIGHTING FRONTS!

THE GREATEST KNIGHT OF THEM ALL!
BLACK KNIGHT


G.I. COMBAT
AIRLIFT TO ETERNITY
Bomb Squad
DOOM PATROL

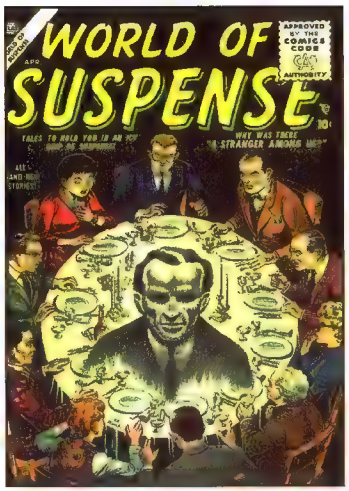
RED MASK
MARCH No. 52
MORE MAGIC of THE PRESTO KID

the FOX and the CROW
I'LL HELP YOU TAKE DOWN THE WASH AS SOON AS I CLEAN MY HANDS, FOXIE!

Little MAX
A JOE PALOOKA

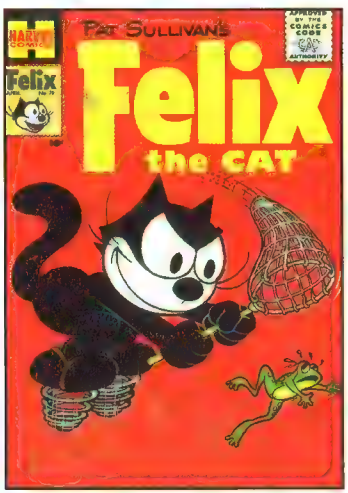
Heart THROBS
"A STORM, SHIPWRECK AND RANSOM TAUGHT ME THE VALUE OF LOVE!"
OH, CLIFF, DARLING... PLEASE DON'T TURN AWAY FROM ME! I'VE LEARNED MY LESSON!
LOOK, BLANCHE, I WANT TO MARRY YOU BUT YOU MUST STOP BEING A SELFISH CHILD! YOU MUST GROW UP!
A FALSE ILLUSION
I FELL FOR MY FIANCE'S BUDDY
A SOLDIER'S DATE
HOME IS WHERE THE HEART IS

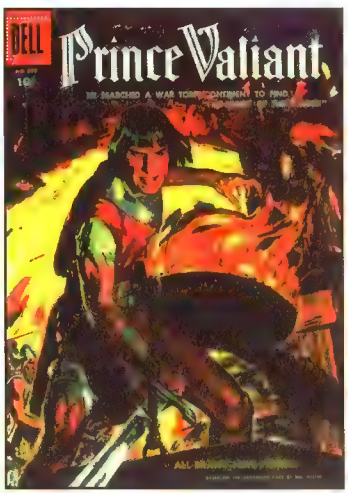
DICK TRACY
COMICS MONTHLY
by CHESTER GOULD


WORLD OF SUSPENSE
APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY

ALL NEW STORIES
STRANGE ADVENTURE
featuring "The MARTIAN MARQUERADER!"
SCIENCE & GANG MASQUERADE PARTY
IT'S MIDNIGHT! UNMASK, EVERYBODY, AND REVEAL YOUR IDENTITIES!
I'M TRAPPED! I HAVE NO MASK TO TAKE OFF -- I'M REALLY A MARTIAN!
APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY

DELL
Walt Disney's
CHIP 'N' DALE

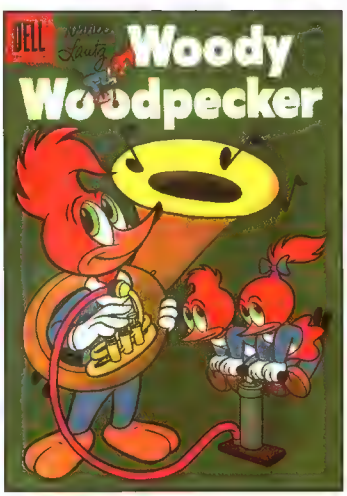

HARVEY COMICS
Felix No. 79
PAT SULLIVAN'S
Felix the CAT
APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY


DELL
Prince Valiant

10c
ALL NEW STORIES
APR. NO. 233
Adventure COMICS
featuring SUPERBOY as "HERCULES JUNIOR!"
IT'S TIME FOR ME TO SWITCH -- NOT TO CLARK KENT--
--BUT TO HERCULES JUNIOR!
Extra! The A B C's of ARCHERY!
APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY

ARCHIE SERIES
Archie's Girls
Betty and Veronica
HI BETTY! YOU ALL READY FOR THE PICNIC?
YOU BET, VERONICA! I'VE GOT THE SODA, SANDWICHES AN' EVERYTHING! WHAT ARE YOU BRINGING?
ARCHIE!

MASTER OF WIND RAIN AND FIRE
Nature BOY
APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY


DELL
Walter Lantz
Woody Woodpecker

up a shorter list, but still quite a respectable quantity to put together.

Although the usefulness of an utterly random target date is clear, the selection of that date is a major commitment and must engage personal interests and include budgetary factors. The comforting fact remains that any date at all is exemplary of the unique social and historical aspects of comic books.

No matter how it is arrived at, choosing the date is, without a doubt, the easiest part of the whole project. Then the real work begins...

Compiling a Want List of Titles

My intention was to assemble all the comics, every title from every publisher, that might have been displayed for sale on the target date. The creation of my want list could not have been done without referring to both the *Gerber's Photo-Journal* and *Overstreet Comic Book Price Guide*, together they provide an abundant supply of information, including first and last issue dates. I went through *Gerber* page by page and retrieved any title that had a publication life that included April, 1956. It quickly became apparent that I could not restrict myself to books that had a cover-date of April because there were many bimonthly books cover-dated March that would have remained on the racks sharing space with the April cover-dated books. Also, I had to include any book with a cover-date which included April on the cover, e.g. April/June for *Daffy* #5, or a cover-date which bridged over April, e.g. *Tweety and Sylvester* #12 which is cover-dated March/May. Furthermore, I had to be alert to include one-shots that might have been published on or just before the target date, e.g. *Lone Ranger Movie Story*, a Dell Giant listed for March, 1956.

Compiling the want list, a task which at first may sound, at best, merely mechanical... and, at worst, tedious, turned out to be a bit more complex. I soon learned about the unpredictable publishing business; that various titles were not reliably published according to the periodicity stated in their indicia (or had discontinuous publication due to switching publishers).

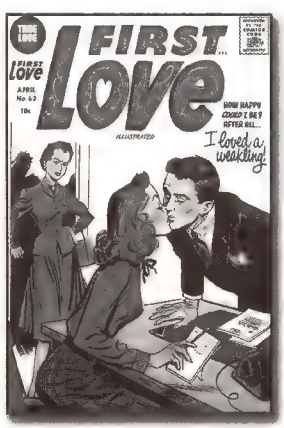
Finally, after carefully sifting through every listing, after exhaustive examination of every publisher, and after extrapolation of every date, I had my basic list: over 200 comic books that could have called out to me from my fantasy comic rack in the spring of '56. My collector craving was now stoked and feverish, I was in high gear and ready to start buying, except for one small detail. Dealers do not list and sell books by cover-date. My want list of titles only got me to the starting line, I couldn't run yet. I absolutely needed to know the exact appropriate and applicable issue number for every title on my list. My troubles had just begun.

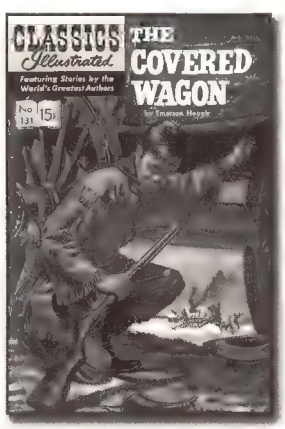
Ascertaining the Issue Numbers

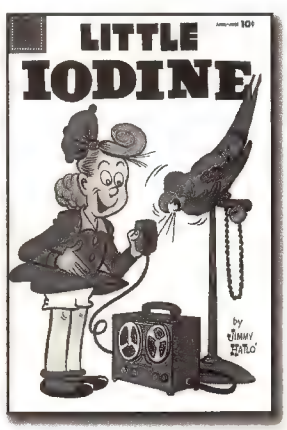
Discovering the issue number needed for each title emerged as the single most formidable problem in the entire endeavor. There is no guide in existence that provides a cross-reference of dates for every issue number of every title. Furthermore, it is impossible to derive a number based on the first issue and the publication schedule, because most titles had irregular publishing histories for one reason or another, including switching from monthly to bimonthly, switching from publisher to publisher, not exactly staying on schedule, etc.. Since there is no easy, foolproof mathematical way to determine the exact issue number for a specific date, I had to take a deep breath and dive into the rolling sea of each title's stormy publication history.

Fortunately *Gerber* and *Overstreet* frequently provide the year/month data for issues in the run of a title, and that helped me zero in on quite a few numbers. In some cases *Gerber* was perfectly useful (e.g. all the Dell *Four Color* books are listed by year and month), so it was instantly possible to get all the titles and numbers for the ten *Four Color* books published for April, 1956. In addition, *Gerber* has reproductions of thousands of covers, so there was the possibility of examining these tiny images with a magnifying glass to see the cover dates, and I got lucky finding quite a few. But this was not an enduring method because *Gerber* does not show every cover of every title, only every cover of short runs or major and seminal titles (e.g.

AMERICA'S PIN-UP QUEEN
KATY KEENE
YIPES! TH' LEAST RANDY COULD DO WOULD BE TO MAKE HIS PRIVATE POND OUT OF SOFT WATER!
PRIVATE POND



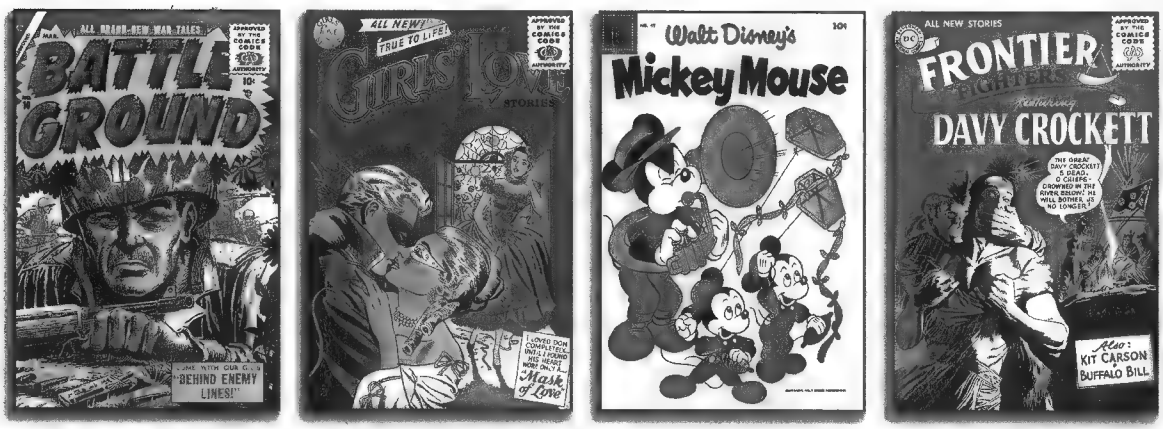




Synchronic collection members... Katy Keene #27, First Love Ill. #63, Classics Illustrated #131 "Covered Wagon," and Little Iodine #2.

Action, Detective, Captain America, Feature Comics, Classics Illustrated, etc.)

Another possible course was to browse through a run at a con and by chance find the correct issue, or at least determine the approximate number range for the issue I sought. Then later, armed with knowledge of the correct range, when I saw a possible number in a dealer's ad or catalog, I would phone the dealer and ask him to please pull the book and tell me what the cover date was. Since dealers are not accustomed to queries about cover-dates, I must say that basically I was sort of a nuisance, and had to depend on the kindness of many wonderfully patient dealers. I am pleased to say that busy dealers across America helped me with courtesy, and after I described my synchronic project many dealers became excited about what I was doing, and told me they did not know of anyone else trying to put together this type of collection. It was heartening to hear that I was involved in a unique endeavor, and this energized me to continue in the face of the various difficulties.



Synchronic collection members... Battle Ground #10, Girls' Love Stories #40, Walt Disney's Mickey Mouse #47, Frontier Fighters #4, Legends of Daniel Boone #5, and Lorna, the Jungle Girl #18.

For numerous titles there was still another way to discover the specific issue I needed. After I had a correct issue from a publisher I would find that they often ran "house ads" between stories, ads that touted other titles of similar interest put out by that publisher. The ads usually reproduced the covers of books on sale that same month. For example, in *Action* #215 there is a typical full page ad for the other DC Superman titles: *Superman, Superman's Pal Jimmy Olsen* and *World's Finest*. Although these covers were printed in coarse screen, you can just about see the issue numbers. In Harvey books the house ads show ten small reproductions, and thus at a glance I readily knew almost all the Harvey titles I needed.

With a hit or miss approach I was gradually able to narrow my searches, but it was often frustrating because of the aforementioned irregularity for some of the titles. I was grinding my teeth trying to pin down quite a few, especially the so-called bimonthly *Nutsy Squirrel*, of which #68 is cover-dated November/December, and has #69 in proper sequence with a cover-date of January/February. I assumed I needed #70 for March/April. WRONG! Issue #70 is cover-dated September, seven long months later! Two other examples of so-called bimonthlies are Charlton's Fightin' *Air Force* (#3) and *Strange Suspense Stories* (#28), both titles with February issues that went unpublished until four months later with June issues. In both cases I used the February issues since they could conceivably have still been on display with the April books.

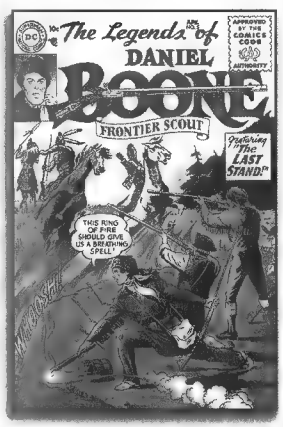
I was moving along just fine, dealing with aberrant publishing patterns and successfully using the cover-date criteria, when in a few instances even this became problematic. In most cases the cover of bimonthly books showed the range, e.g. "Mar.-Apr." or used the first month of the range, here it would be "March." But occasionally they used the second month of the range on the cover. *Red Mask* #52 is cover-dated "March" but the indicia says it is the February-March issue. This gave rise to a perplexing glitch in my methodology because the April-May issue has "May" on the cover, and using an issue with "May" on the cover would violate my rule for some form of "April" to be printed on the cover. I was faced with the tough decision of whether or not I could tolerate a book on my fantasy rack for April with an apparently advance copy with a May cover-date. I ultimately decided that I would go with consistency of cover-dates; I wanted visual continuity involving the month of April, regardless of information gleaned by actually picking up a book and studying the indicia. In this case I chose to use the *Red Mask* #52 cover-dated March, secure in the knowledge that at least this book could have been on the April fantasy rack. Fortunately this problem only arose a few times. (As many *CBM* readers know, the amazing vagaries and irregularities of comic book over-dates are hardly ever mentioned.)

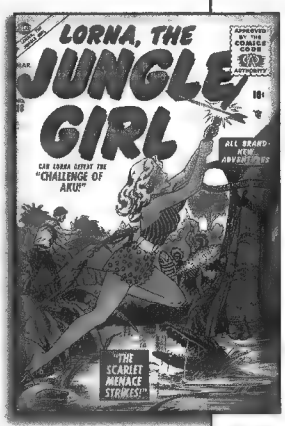
Finally, after meticulously formulating the complete want list of titles with relevant issue numbers, developing it from *Gerber, Overstreet*, house ads, the kindness of dealers, and hands-on exploration, I could finally proceed with the standard methods of acquisition. Lower grade "reading" copies wouldn't

do. I sought the highest grade books in order to maximize the temporal impact of the assemblage (how did the books actually look on the stands). As the collection came together, I began to reap many joys, unexpected pleasures and well-earned rewards.

The Education of an Aficionado

Cheap! One of the first things I was pleased about was that, although a few books cost over $100, for the most part the books were not expensive, even in high grade. This refreshing aspect gave the endeavor additional legitimacy, after all, I could get my collector thrills and chills without spending the big bucks that a collection of *Superman, Batman* or *Spider-Man* might entail. As long as a synchronic collector stayed away from the early Golden Age, or the aforementioned early '50s when upwards of 600 titles were published per year, a collection need not cost a small fortune. In the early '60s and '70s as few as 189 titles came out in an entire year, so a collection from





that period would be relatively inexpensive.

But any period would have its complement of tough books that are hard to find regardless of the demand for them. Scarcity not only reflects demand but how many copies were carefully stored by readers. Funny animal titles are hard to find in high grade because young children did not carefully store books, certainly not the way a teenager might have meticulously preserved *Classics Illustrated* for future book reports. So even though *Andy Panda* or *Daffy* might not guide for high numbers, they can be extremely tough to find in high grade.

The hunt and eventual finding of tough books is certainly part of the thrill of collecting, but a surprisingly tough book, which invariably elicits a groan from dealers, as if they had never seen one, is *Sugar and Spike* #1. This book has a high *Gerber* scarcity index of 7 and has utterly eluded me. I had no idea what was going on here until I learned that the entire 98 issue run of this title was written and drawn by Sheldon Mayer, considered one of the most brilliantly innovative editors and

April/May 1956

Action #215 (DC, Apr)
Adventure #223 (DC, Apr)
Adv. Into the Unknown #72 (ACG, Apr)
Adv. of Bob Hope #38 (DC, Apr-May)
Adv. of Martin & Lewis #28 (DC, Apr)
Adv. of Mighty Mouse #129 (Pines, Apr)
Adv. of Mr. Frog & Miss Mouse #4 (Dell, Apr)
Adv. of Rex the Wonder Dog #26 (DC, Mar-Apr)
All Am. Men of War #32 (DC, Apr)
Alley Oop #3 (Argo, Mar)
All Star Western #88 (DC, Apr-May)
Andy Panda #33 (Dell, Feb-Apr)
Angel #5 (Dell, Feb-Apr)
Annie Oakley & Tagg #7 (Dell, Apr-Jun)
Apache Kid #19 (Atlas, Apr)
Archie #79 (Archie, Mar-Apr)
Archie's Girls Betty & Veronica #23 (Archie, Mar)
Archie's Joke Book #21 (Arcnie, Mar)
Archie's Pal Jughead #35 (Archie, Apr)
Astonishing #48 (Atlas, Apr)
Atomic Mouse #16 (Charlt., ?)
Batman #99 (DC, Apr)
Battle #45 (Atlas, Mar)
Battle Action #22 (Atlas, Apr)
Battle Front #39 (Atlas, Mar)
Battle Ground #10 (Atlas, Mar)
Beetle Bailey #5 (Dell, Feb-Apr)
Big Town #38 (DC, Mar-Apr)
Black Cat Mystery #57 (Harvey, Jan-Mar)
Blackhawk #99 (Quality, Apr)
Black Knight #5 (Atlas, Apr)
Blondie #89 (Harvey, Apr)
Boy Comics #119 (Lev Gleason, Mar)
Brave & Bold #5 (DC, Apr-May)
Bugs Bunny #48 (Dell, Apr-May)
Casper #43 (Harvey, Apr)
Chip 'N' Dale #5 (Dell, Mar-May)
Cisco Kid #26 (Dell, Mar-Apr)
Combat Casey #27 (Atlas, Apr)
Combat Kelly #36 (Atlas, Apr)
Four Color (Conqueror) #690 (Dell, Apr)
Class. Ill. (Covered Wagon) #131 (Gilberton, Apr)
Cowboy Action #11 (Atlas, Mar)
Cowboy Western #59 (Charlton, Apr)
Daffy #5 (Dell, Apr-Jun)
Dagwood #64 (Harvey, Apr)
Daredevil #131 (Lev Gleason, Mar)
Date with Judy #52 (DC, Apr-May)
Davy Crockett #5 (Charlton, Mar)
Dennis the Menace #15 (Pines, Mar)
Detective Comics #230 (DC, Apr)
Dick Tracy #98 (Harvey, Apr)
Donald Duck #46 (Dell, Mar-Apr)
Four Color (Dotty Dripple & Taffy) #691 (Dell, Apr)
Four Color (Duck Album) #686 (Dell, Mar)
Exploits of Daniel Boone #3 (Quality, Mar)
Falling in Love #4 (Arleigh (DC), Apr)
Felix the Cat #70 (Harvey, Apr)
Fightin' Air Force #3 (Charlton, Feb)
Fightin' Army #17 (Charlton, Apr)
First Love Illustrated #63 (Harvey, Apr)
First Romance #39 (Harvey, Apr)
Flippity & Flop #27 (DC, Apr-May)
Flying Aces #5 (Key, Mar)
Flying A's Range Rider #13 (Dell, Mar-May)
Forbidden Worlds #42 (ACG, Apr)
Fox & the Crow #32 (DC, Apr)
Four Color (Francis...Talking Mule) #698 (Dell, Apr)
Frontier Fighters #4 (DC, Mar-Apr)
Frontier Western #2 (Atlas, Apr)
Gang Busters #51 (DC, Apr-May)
Gene Autrey & Champion #108 (Dell, Mar-Apr)
G.I. Combat #35 (Quality, Apr)
G.I. Joe #44 (Ziff-Davis, Apr)
Girl's Love Stories #40 (DC, Apr)
Girl's Romances #37 (Signal [DC], Mar)
Gunsmoke Western #34 (Atlas, Apr)
Heart Throbs #42 (Quality, Apr)
Henry #46 (Dell, Apr-Jun)
Heroes...Wild Frontier #2 (Ace, Apr)
Hi-School Romance #50 (Harvey, Apr)
Hopalong Cassidy #110 (DC, Apr)
House of Mystery #49 (DC, Apr)
Howdy Doody #37 (Dell, Apr-June)
It's Gametime #4 (DC, Mar-Apr)
Jace Pearson's Texas Rangers #11 (Dell, Mar-May,)
Jann of the Jungle #10 (Atlas, Apr)
Jesse James #27 (Avon, Apr)
Joe Palooka #94 (Harvey, Mar)
Journey Into Mystery #33 (Atlas, Apr)
Journey Into Unknown Worlds #44 (Atlas, Apr)
Jungle Jim #8 (Dell, Apr-Jun)
Katy Keene #27 (Archie, Mar)
Kid Colt Outlaw #59 (Atlas, Apr)
King of the Royal Mounted #20 (Dell, Mar-May)
Four Color (Krazy Kat) #696 (Dell, Apr)
Lassie #27 (Dell, Mar-Apr)
Laugh #74 (Archie, Apr)
Legends of Daniel Boone #5 (DC, Apr)
Little Archie #1 (Archie, Apr)
Little Audrey #47 (Harvey, Apr)
Four Color (Little Beaver) #695 (Dell, Apr)
Little Dot #6 (Harvey, Mar)
Little Iodine #2 (Dell, Apr-June)
Little Lotta #3 (Harvey, Mar)
Little Max #40 (Harvey, Apr)
Four Color (Little People) #692 (Dell, Apr)
Lone Ranger #94 (Dell, Apr)

creators in the history of comics, and issue #1 of *Sugar and Spike* guides for over $1,000 in NM. On second thought, I am kind of glad one hasn't turned up!

Information about Sheldon Mayer is an example of the interesting comic arcanum I was delighted to learn as my collection came together. Thanks to the splendid overview afforded by the synchronic collection, I gained a perspective on titles, publishers, and artists that I never would have acquired but for this effort. In order to keep track of all the details, I maintained a comprehensive catalog, including: title, issue, total in run, publication date, publisher, artist, genre, Gerber scarcity rating, and monetary valuations. I memorized where certain books figure in their specific history. For example, the collection includes the premier issue of *Little Archie* (#1) and the last issue of *Straight Arrow* (#55). Having absorbed a basic familiarity with over 200 titles, I fast became a bit of an historian in my own right.

GENRE TRENDS

Looking at my collection en masse provides a singular sense of the cultural Zeitgeist of that period, and E. Gerber's market share chart (Vol. 2, Pg. C-10) overtly illustrates certain outstanding characteristics. Quite remarkable is the tiny 3% share for fantasy superheroes; the only super-humans who had their own titles were Superman, Superboy, Wonder Woman, and Plastic Man, plus a short three issue run for Charlton's Nature Boy.

Maybe this aversion towards hyperbolic capabilities reflected the harsh new reality of the atomic bomb and the seriousness of the cold war. Perhaps readers in the mid-1950s had less extravagant expectations for miracles and knew our destiny depended on thoughtful reasoning. (I remember that I particularly liked Batman because he solved crimes using his skills as a detective.) Or maybe superheroes were just too imaginary, not accessible like the regular guys that kids could easily relate to. Superman's Pal Jimmy Olsen and Spin and Marty on the Mickey Mouse Club were all were big attractions for my friends and me.

But most notable are the cowboys. 1956 was a peak year for the western genre... representing at 17% the largest category of comic books! Western TV shows were proliferating as well, all due to the mythic spectre of the old west.

The other prominent genre (possibly as a result of the "invention" of teenagers in the early '50s creating a larger market) was romance comics, which were the second largest category with 15% of the market. Love was in the air; a major news event in April of 1956 was the glamorous marriage of Hollywood star Grace Kelly to Prince Rainier of Monaco.

SERENDIPITY

One of the advantages of the synchronic effort was that I was in the market to buy so many different titles that I was almost assured of finding a book at every con I attended. Also, if a collection of high grade file copies or pedigree books went on sale there was a good chance I would find something I needed.

For example, in 1993-94, Comic Investments and Diamond International Galleries sold file copies of Harvey and Dell titles, a golden opportunity to avail myself of these super high grade books, at only $10-$35 each (for Near Mint books yet). What other kind of a collection would give you a perfectly rational reason to buy all these different titles? And what a delight it was, encompassing so many books that I would have ignored, so many wonderfully crisp and intensely colorful covers; radioactive reds on Felix the Cat, vibrant yellows on *Dick Tracy*, iridescent blues on *Casper*, and the brighter-than-bright *Tom and Jerry, Little Iodine,* and *Bugs Bunny.* Also included were the wonderfully drawn Disney titles *Chip 'n' Dale, Mickey Mouse, Donald Duck* #46 (which contains the famous Carl Barks story "Secret of Hondorica,"), and the *Song of the South* (*Four Color* #693) movie adaptation, the videotape of which has been withdrawn and is unavailable due to political correctness considerations.

The Barks story was not the only serendipitous gem to turn up. There was also *MAD* #27 with an extraordinary front and back cover by Jack Davis with hundreds of people in it, which was called "...the greatest *MAD* cover of all time" by Russ Cochran and is reprinted, in a full page homage to his inspirational roots, by R. Crumb in his recently published *Coffee Table Art Book.* Some other lucky inclusions are the cover story and first appearance of the Mad Hatter in *Detective* #230 and the origin story of the Presto Kid in *Red Mask* #52.

But the most fortuitous inclusion that satisfied my prediction that something significant would turn up in a random date selection was *Showcase* #1. This book is a defining event in the history of comics because six months later *Showcase* #4 came out with the resurrection of The Flash and is considered to be the dawn of the Silver Age of comics. Therefore this synchronic collection of April, 1956, highlighted by the presence of *Showcase* #1, could lay claim to being a frozen snapshot of the dramatic end of an era, the actual "Midnight" of the Atom Age of Comics!

AUSPICIOUS TIMING OF ACQUISITION

The timing of acquisitions could turn out to be well timed. It is possible that titles purchased solely for the synchronic collection that are not particularly hot at the time of acquisition can experience a surge in their value. I bought the *MAD* #27 in VF in 1991 for $25 shortly before the explosive increase in *MAD* prices, and now that copy guides for $250. A striking increase also accrued for the aforementioned *Donald Duck* #46, of which I bought a file copy for $30 in early 1994, with the pleasant development that this issue now guides for at least $200. So you never know what title, innocently purchased by necessity, will turn out to be a great investment. This is another of the beneficial possibilities a synchronic collection can provide; you can accidentally emerge looking like a prophetic investment genius!

The Writers & Artists

A major pleasure provided by the large assortment of titles in a synchronic collection is the inclusion of art by many masters of the medium. I was thrilled to have some definitive and peak work by Wayne Boring in classic Superman stories, the cover of *Action* #215 was even singled out, in the 60th Anniversary of Superman issue of *CBM*, as the "...greatest image on a Boring/Kaye cover." In addition I have wonderful work by the likes of Joe Kubert, Russ Heath, Grandenetti, and Wally Wood in the DC superhero, war and adventure titles, Bill Ely in crime and mystery books, and John Buscema in Dell's *Roy Rogers*.

I always looked forward to the art in the ACG horror/mystery books; the understated realism, typical of that era, helped sell the outrageous ideas and made the impossible seem possible. Ogden Whitney's art was particularly clean and convincing, and I admired Editor/writer Hughes at ACG for not talking down to the readers; they weren't condescending and the stories had real finesse (especially avoiding the stretching stories with gratuitous padding). If a story could be told in three or four pages, sometimes even in one page, that was fine and you might get four or five stories in one book. Atlas was another publisher that went straight for the gut, fitting as many as six stories in a book.

After the collapse of the EC line, most of the artists moved on to work for other publishers. For example, Bernard Krigstein worked for Atlas in their horror/mystery titles, and another wonderful example of a fortuitous inclusion in my collection is *Uncanny Tales* #43. Krigstein was known for abandoning the "wasteful" splash page and launching right into his stories in a cinematic melange of panels, and he established a new record with "They Went Below," a story in which he fit 75 panels into only 4 pages!

In addition to reacquainting me with numerous old favorites, I had the pleasure of discovering and enjoying art in titles I never read when I was a kid, e.g. Joe Maneely's fabulous romantic realism in *Black Knight*, Jesse Marsh's atmospheric Tarzan, tons of John Severin's distinctive inking on a plethora of Atlas war and western titles, and the aforementioned *Uncanny Tales* containing a pre-*MAD* Mort Drucker story entitled "The Telepathic Typewriter." There is even some late Fred Guardineer work in *Red Mask* #52.

Enjoying specific artists and knowing their names is commonplace today, but back in 1956 it was basically impossible to form a fan base for particular writers and artists because the work appeared mostly uncredited (with the possible exception of EC of course). For the most part, books were created with tremendous care and love by unnamed people.

The then-unheralded work of Carl Barks in *Donald Duck* #46 is a perfect example. The "Old Duckman" and father of Uncle Scrooge is nowadays identified without fail. But back then we didn't know him. Yes, we all knew Walt Disney himself didn't write and draw the stories, but the actual creators labored in obscurity... and were never revealed to the legions of young

Lone Ranger's Companion Tonto #22 (Dell, Feb-Apr)
Lone Ranger Movie Story #1 (Dell, Mar)
Lone Ranger's Horse Hi-Yo Silver #18 (Dell, Apr-June)
Looney Tunes #174 (Dell, Apr)
Lorna Jungle Girl #18 (Atlas, Mar)
Love Problems & Advice Ill. #38 (Harvey, Mar)
Marge's Little Lulu #94 (Del., Apr)
Marge's Little Lulu & Her Friends #4 (Dell, Mar)
Marge's Tubby #16 (Dell, Apr-June)
Marines in Action #6 (Atlas, Apr)
Marines in Battle #11 (Atlas, Apr)
Marvel Tales #145 (Atlas, Apr)
Mazie #21 (Archie, Apr)
Mickey Mouse #47 (Dell, Apr-May)
Mr. District Attorney #50 (DC, Mar-Apr)
Mutt & Jeff #86 (DC, Apr)
My Greatest Adventure #8 (DC, Mar-Apr)
My Little Margie #11 (Charlton, Mar)
Mystery in Space #31 (DC, Apr-May)
Mystery Tales #40 (Atlas, Apr)
Mystic #46 (Atlas, Apr)
Nancy & Sluggo #131 (St. John, Apr)
Nature Boy #3 (Charlton, Mar)
Navy Action #11 (Atlas, Apr)
Navy Combat #6 (Atlas, Apr)
New Funnies #230 (Dell, Apr)
Nutsy Squirrel #69 (DC, Jan-Feb)
Four Color (Oswald the Rabbit) #697 (Dell, Apr)
Our Army at War #45 (DC, Apr)
Our Fighting Forces #10 (DC, Apr-May)
Outlaw Kid #10 (Atlas, Mar)
Pep #114 (Archie, Mar)
Peter Porkchops #43 (DC, Apr-May)
Plastic Man #61 (Quality, Apr)
Popeye #36 (Dell, Apr-Jun)
Porky Pig #45 (Dell, Mar-Apr)
FC (Prince Valiant) #699 (Dell, Apr)
Queen...West Dale Evans #11 (Dell, Apr-Jun)
Rawhide Kid #7 (Atlas, Mar)
Real Screen #97 (DC, ?)
Red Mask #52 (ME, Mar)
Red Ryder #147 (Dell, Apr-Jun)
Rex Allen #20 (Dell, Mar-May)
Ringo Kid #11 (Atlas, Apr)
Rin Tin Tin #12 (Dell, Apr)
Robin Hood #3 (ME, Mar)
Robin Hood & His Merry Men #28 (Charlton, Apr)
Robin Hood Tales #2 (Quality, Apr)
Rocky Lane #71 (Charlton, Mar)
Rookie Cop #28 (Charlton, ?)
Roy Rogers & Trigger #100 (Dell, Apr)
Sad Sack #57 (Harvey, Apr)
Sad Sack's Funny Friends #3 (Harvey, Apr)
Secret Hearts #32 (Arleigh [DC], Mar)
Sergeant Preston...Yukon #18 (Dell, Feb-Apr)
Showcase #1 (DC, Mar)
Six-Gun Heroes #37 (Charlton, Feb)
Four Color (Song of the South) #693 (Dell, Apr)
Space Adventures #20 (Charlton, Mar)
Spellbound #27 (Atlas, Apr)
Spike & Tyke #5 (Dell, Mar-May)
Spooky #3 (Harvey, Apr)
Star Spangled War Stories #44 (DC, Apr)
Straight Arrow #55 (ME, Mar)
Strange Adventures #67 (DC, Apr)
Strange Stories of Suspense #8 (Atlas, Apr)
Strange Suspense Stories #28 (Charlton, Feb)
Strange Tales #45 (Atlas, Apr)
Strange Tales...Unusual #3 (Atlas, Apr)
Sugar & Spike #1 (DC, Apr-May)
Superboy #48 (DC, Apr)
Four Color (Super Circus) #694 (Dell, Apr)
Superman #104 (DC, Mar)
Superman's Pal Jimmy Olsen #12 (DC, Apr)
Tales...Unexpected #2 (DC, Apr-May)
Tarzan #79 (Dell, Apr)
Three Mouseketeers #1 (DC, Mar-Apr)
Tip Top #197 (St. John, Apr)
Tomahawk #39 (DC, Mar)
Tom & Jerry #141 (Dell, Apr)
True Bride-To-Be Romances #17 (Harvey, Apr)
Tweety & Sylvester #12 (Dell, Mar-May)
Two-Gun Kid #30 (Atlas, Apr)
Uncanny Tales #42 (Atlas, Apr)
Uncle Scrooge #13 (Dell, Apr)
Unusual Tales #3 (Charlton, Mar)
WD's Comics & Stories #187 (Dell, Apr)
War #40 (Atlas, Mar)
Warfront #28 (Harvey, Jan-Mar)
Four Color (Water Birds & Olympic Elk) #700 (Dell, Apr)
Western Comics #56 (DC, Mar-Apr)
Western Kid #9 (Atlas, Apr)
Western Outlaws #14 (Atlas, ?)
Western Roundup #14 (Dell, Apr-Jun)
Wilbur #65 (Archie, Mar)
Wild Western #48 (Atlas, Mar)
Witches Tales #32 (Harvey, Jan-Mar)
Wonder Woman #81 (DC, Apr)
Woody Woodpecker #36 (Dell, Apr-May)
World of Suspense #1 (Atlas, Apr)
World's Finest #81 (DC, Mar-Apr)
Wyatt Earp #3 (Atlas, Mar)
Zane Grey's Stories...West #29 (Dell, Mar-May)
Zaza the Mystic #10 (Charlton, Apr)

readers who devoured every page. (Along these same lines, the *Mickey Mouse* comic book was drawn in a distinctive style by the uncredited Paul Murry.)

In fact some publishers (such as Western/Dell) forbade the artists from signing their names. Today contributors names are on the cover and splash pages, with credits for writing, penciling, inking, coloring, erasing, and who goes out for coffee. Back in my time no one would know what you were talking about with those credits; an 11-year-old comic fan in 1956 was essentially oblivious to writers and artists. We knew stories, titles, and what we liked… while only a few serious aficionados knew who the creators were.

Certainly there were exceptions. Bill Gaines always celebrated his staff; each artist was profiled in various issues, and EC stories were always signed. After *MAD* became a magazine the masthead proudly listed the immortal triumvirate of Jack Davis, Wally Wood and Bill Elder. Albeit, starting with issue #51, even these virtuosic masters were dissolved into "…the usual gang of idiots."

Fortunately for my search, by the time the "Gigantic" Bronze Age anthology *Strange Adventures* #230 was published in 1971, there was a lot more fan interest in the creators, and the reprinted stories now had writer and artist credits added into the splash page of the stories. But in the mid-'50s you would rarely know who did the work unless the character originated in the more established media of the funny pages or movie cartoons, and those creators' names appeared on the comic book covers. Some examples in the collection derived from the newspapers are Chic Young's *Dagwood,* Chester Gould's *Dick Tracy*, Carl Anderson's *Henry,* Ham Fisher's *Joe Palooka,* Jimmy Hatlo's *Little Iodine*, Ernie Bushmiller's *Nancy & Sluggo*, George Baker's *Sad Sack,* Mort Walker's *Beetle Bailey*, and Marge's *Little Lulu*.

Examples from movie cartoons are Paul Terry's *Mighty Mouse,* Walter Lantz's *Woody Woodpecker,* and Pat Sullivan's *Felix the Cat*. Sometimes the movie studio itself was credited in the titles… *MGM's Spike and Tyke, Paramount Pictures Casper*, and *Walt Disney's* this and that.

ART DIRECTION

In contrast to the aforementioned masters of the medium, sometimes the artwork I came across was done with marginal drawing skill. Some of the artists could hardly draw well enough to be used and the art was evidently hacked out in a cursory fashion with little accuracy in perspective, and often the characters didn't look the same from panel to panel. I suppose that in any commercial field there are always those who will exploit the marketplace using lesser talents.

But delightfully, the synchronic collection gave me an array of fascinating esoteric designs used on the covers. For example, five of the Atlas horror/mystery titles; *Journey Into Mystery, Strange Stories of Suspense, Strange Tales of the Unusual, Mystic,* and *Marvel Tales*, all have unusual cover designs employing vignetted images captioned with the story title, pre-

AS DUSK STAINS THE WIND-LASHED SKY, WAVES CRASH AGAINST THE JAGGED ROCKS! WHILE THE LIGHTHOUSE, THE LONELY KEEPER PREPARES TO TURN THE BEACON ON! BUT EVIL LURKS BELOW THOSE CHARMING WATERS…AND THE DECREE OF EVIL IS THAT THE WARNING BEACON REMAIN DARK TONIGHT!
THEY WAIT BELOW
I'VE BEEN ALONE TOO LONG…
IF I COULD ONLY BE AMONG FOLKS AGAIN…
TO HEAR LAUGHING AND TALK!
I'M TIRED… TIRED!
I NEED REST!
AHH…NO CHANCE OF THAT, TILL MY RELIEF COMES!
IT'S TIME NOW…
…TIME TO LIGHT THE BEACON!
TO LIGHT THE…
Z-Z-Z-Z

Z-Z-Z-Z-Z-Z
SWIP! IPPP! BRRPP!
HUH!
GOOD GRIEF! THE BEACON! NOT TO LIGHT!
KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK
WHA—WHAT COULD THAT BE!?
A GIRL…AND DRENCHED TO THE SKIN!
HOW'D YOU GET HERE FROM THE MAINLAND?
WHO ARE YOU?
WHAT DO YOU WANT ON THIS FOR-SAKEN ROCK?
I CAME TO WAIT HERE…
WITH YOU!
NOW STORM CLOUDS ARE SWELLING IN THE SKY…
AND JUST BEYOND THE HORIZON, A SHIP IS STEERING A COURSE THAT WILL BRING IT CRASHING INTO THE JAGGED ROCKS…
UNLESS MATT RONSON REMEMBERS TO LIGHT THE WARNING BEACON!
YOU ARE A STRANGE CREATURE…I'VE NEVER BEEN AMONG ONE LIKE YOU… BUT JUST HEARING A VOICE MAKES ME FEEL ALIVE AGAIN!

WE'RE IN FOR A BAD STORM, MATE!
AYE, CAPTAIN…BUT IT'S NOT THE STORM THAT WORRIES ME
WITH THE CAPTAIN'S PERMISSION, I'D LIKE TO SOUND THE POSHORN!
IF IT'LL MAKE YOU HAPPY…START SOUNDING!
I'LL BE RIGHT DOWN!
WAIT DOWN HERE WITH ME!
GASP!
I-I KNOW THAT!
I…I'VE READ ABOUT THEM!

Krigstein story containing 75 panels in 4 pages from Uncanny Tales #42.

senting a stimulating visual table of contents. Another oddity was the combination art and photograph cover for *My Little Margie,* based on the sitcom TV show starring Gale Storm. Another interesting solution are covers that have the inside on the outside, that is, multiple story panels complete with dialogue, as seen on Combat Kelly and the teen humor books *My Date With Judy, Mazie,* and the Archie titles.

Production Quality

While putting this collection together, and carefully examining the quality of the books, I received quite a technical education about the printing process. I was getting a wide range of paper and inks among the publishers; some papers have browned more than others and some colors have become much less brilliant.

Of course, storage conditions can affect these aspects, but there is also a remarkable variation in the precision printing of the four colors. The books of lower quality exhibit hardly a nod to the concept of registration; the colors are printed way outside of the outline that was drawn in black and don't overlay the other colors properly. Sometimes ugly blotches appear that look like a bottle of ink accidentally fell over and spilled out. Some of the books were obviously the equivalent of "exploitation films," produced on the cheap to take advantage of the market, particularly the western craze.

The writing, the art, the printing, the paper, the folding and binding, all these elements were wildly erratic in quality. So even as I enjoyed the wonderful variety of colors, logo designs and styles of artwork, it was also instructive to have a collection which reveals the high achievement possible, and which additionally demonstrates the pitfalls inherent in taking shortcuts to rush to market with a poorly crafted product.

The Photograph

In view of all the prizes unearthed for this collection, I know one thing for sure: the efficacy of the random target date has been amply proven. Just looking at a sample of the marvelous display in the *CBM* Color Gallery, with all the colors, characters and designs preserving the flavor of a fleeting moment in history, provides an edifying justification for facing the challenges involved in amassing this type of collection.

It has been great fun, even affording me a painless and amusing education, and insofar as collectors particularly prize owning something that is one-of-a-kind, a synchronic collection certainly comes close to being unique. After all, what are the odds that some other person might collect the same date as your collection? So there is an excellent chance that your synchronic collection would deliver that scintillating thrill that only comes from having something no one else does, a feeling which is tough to achieve by assembling even a complete run of a single title.

Following the satisfying accomplishment of completing my collection I wanted to share it with a wider audience in a charming, nostalgic format. And so with great pleasure I created the photograph you see in the opener of this article. A synchronic collection provides the special opportunity to recreate a moment of time long gone, and it was especially convenient to use my own parallel collection of dozens of magazines from the target date to do the fashion research for the shoot. After casting my niece Nikki and nephew Henry as the models, we went shopping at vintage clothing stores and were lucky to find everything we needed; the polka dot scarf, saddle shoes and flared skirt for the girl… the dungarees, Brooklyn Dodgers cap, and authentic Keds sneakers for the boy.

After a circuitous journey that began on a Sixth Avenue bus and took me back and forth through time, I now have this luminous image showing a moment in comic book history.

AND THERE'S NOTHING AHEAD BUT DARKNESS!
A FOGHORN CLOSE BY—AND THE BEACON'S STILL DARK! WE'RE SO...
NO!
THE SHIP MUST CRASH INTO THE ROCKS, SO YOU AND I AND MY SISTERS...CAN PLUNDER IT!
YOU'LL BE RICH, MATT!
RICH!!
OH JOE...
IT'S MY TURN TO WARM SHIPS...
AND I'M DROWNING TOO!
WHAT, MATT?
WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO?
WHERE DID THEY COME FROM?
NO!
NO! NO!
WHAT, MATT?
DON'T COME NEAR...
MATT? WHAT, MATT?
CASTING LOOK...!
A WARNING LIGHT!
REVERSED ENGINES!
IN THE MORNING, THE MEN FROM THE MAINLAND HEARD ABOUT THE BURNING OF THE LIGHTHOUSE, AND HOW THE FIRE WARNED THE SHIP OFF...
BUT WHEN THEY HEAR OF THE BRAWL...
MATT'S BEEN ALONE TOO LONG!
HE'S BRUTED SEEING THINGS!
LOOK HERE!
DO YOU STILL THINK I WAS SEEING THINGS?

Editor's Note: Steve Cooper has self-published a limited number of the opening photograph as a beautiful color poster (Cibachrome print). If you are interested and wish to be on the mailing list for the offering call (212) 279-4543, or send your name and address to Sybille Gallery, 5 West 31st St., New York, NY 10001.

CBM Forum

WERE THEY EVER GOOD INVESTMENTS?

Opinion by Keith Contarino

Point #1 I think the complaints about material on ebay being over-graded are, well, overblown. The books I've received have been as accurately graded as those I've seen at shows and through *CBM/CBG* over the last five years. I've sold over 500 items and had zero returns. Also, I've only returned three or four purchases out of over 150 that I've bought.

Point #2 My friend Craig Rader recently submitted an opinion piece to *CBM* Forum (*CBM* #66). I agree with a lot of it but, what a surprise!, I take exception to some of it and Gary was gracious enough to let me offer my humble opinion in print. So here goes.

The gist of Craig's article centers around price spreads and the grade condition, Fine. I agree with him whole-heartedly that credit needs to be given to the folks at Overstreet. Many comics have been over-priced in the *Guide* for years and finally, some sanity was put into pricing structure last year, with many books being lowered in value (especially in low and mid grades). On the other hand, I disagree with the devaluation of almost any Silver Age or Golden Age superhero title in true and strict NM (and I think Craig does too).

Point #3 Craig stated in a previous *CBM* Forum that mid-grade Marvels were "no longer" good investments. But were they EVER really good investments? Even before the devaluations, with the exception of some keys, the mid grades were always the bane of my dealer existence especially as prices escalated. I maintained as early as 1988 that for long-term value, truly high grade Marvels were what to purchase.

Craig rightly points out that based on current *Overstreet* price valuations even many high grade Silver Age comics have not done very well over the past 12-18 months. This is not surprising with the stock market continuing to seemingly skyrocket ever onward. Even with the correction of this past summer, the stock market seems to be a safer and more profitable place to be than collectibles.

In 1987, when the market tanked, people sold off and collectibles went nuts. This year, people were buying stocks and continue to do so. Your average stock investor is a lot smarter than he was 12 years ago. I'm suggesting that as long as the stock market flourishes, expect collectibles to lag.

Point #4 Craig goes on to state at some length why he believes the devaluation of many Silver Age titles by *Overstreet* is wrong and why he feels NM prices should go up. He uses *Daredevil* as an example. I agree with him on *DD* #7. This book is impossible to find in high grade and sells immediately when offered. I haven't seen a NM copy in 20 years or more. But Craig also makes what I believe to be a common mistake when discussing comic prices: he confuses the quality of the product with the quality of its investment. So what if Wally Wood and Joe Orlando worked on *Daredevil*? I agree with Craig that these are GREAT works of art but they have NEVER sold well except during the Silver Boom of 6-12 years ago and then only in high grade. Yes, Romita's first work at Marvel is of HISTORICAL significance and should be pointed out in the *Guide*... but historical significance does NOT automatically equate with monetary significance. In this case it never has.

Point #5 Craig appears to be against any devaluation for "philosophical" reasons. Since when is the *Overstreet Price Guide* (or any price guide for that matter) supposed to be a philosophical treatise? The purpose of the *Guide* is to accurately portray what prices ARE, not what anyone WANTS them to be. I have ranted and raved for years that this principle of "steady growth over time" is nonsense if it's based on reporting false values in the *Guide*. If something similar went on at the NYSE they'd throw everyone in jail! There is no logical reason any comic should continue to go up and up and up and up with no downturns in any price guide unless ACTUAL SALES reflect it. When *Spider-Man* #1 in Good can no longer be sold at its guide price, then it is the duty and responsibility of that guide to LOWER the price. That's what a price guide is: a reflection of what things sell for. Sure, price guides cannot be perfectly up to date as they don't come out every day like the NYSE. But to be legitimate, they need to reflect real prices... not prices Craig, or me, or Gary Carter, or Bob Overstreet, or anyone else THINK they should be. The guide price has to be based on actual sales!

Point #6 In fairness to Craig, he's right on target with many of his examples and it points out a major problem I've had with ALL comic price guides over the years... i.e. computer-generated spreads and prices. Take Craig's example of *Strange Tales* #115 and #135. These two books have and continue to sell well above *Guide* in NM. Every time I try to order a #135 in high grade, it's gone and never returned. Even on ebay where high grades don't yet bring multiples of *Guide*, *Strange Tales* #135 is always at or above its *Guide* price if listed in NM. What possible sense does it make to drop this book in NM? Clearly, somebody is not paying attention. Same is true for #111, #114, and #115 (and even #119). All have been consistent good sellers in high grade at above *Guide* prices so they should go up.

Point #7 But... Craig falls into the "quality vs. investment" trap with some of his other examples. I love the Anderson and Adams' Spectre. Great art and wonderful stories. Beautiful comic books! I've often wondered why they are such rotten sellers and always have been. On ebay, for example, high-grade

copies are always available at very reasonable bids yet other Adams' books are expensive. Who knows?

Conan #1 is another. I once referred to it as a comic that "stinks up your mailbox." I was soundly taken to task by collectors who went on and on about what a great comic it is and how historically important it is.

Absolutely true!! But SO WHAT? Again, I love *Conan* #1… and 2-24 as well! I agree that it's a "gateway" book as Craig states. I have a nice copy in my collection, but it is (and has been for many years) a horrible investment in any grade… unless bought very cheap. Even then it's been my experience that it has always been a hard sell.

Why? Beats me but I really don't care why. The important thing is for the *Guide* to accurately reflect what *Conan* #1 SELLS FOR. If it didn't sell at $225 or $190 or even $160, it should be devalued until it does even if it has to go down to $50! Craig is wrong to claim that its devaluation is an unwarranted chop job if its devaluation was based on sales figures. Craig argues against *Conan* #1's devaluation solely from philosophical positions. If he argued that the devaluation should not have occurred because he knew of many sales of *Conan* #1 at or above *Guide*, that would be another story, but he doesn't.

Point #8 Craig quotes T. J. Johnson as saying once comics go up gradually over time they shouldn't go back down. What?

Craig goes on to say we "respected *Overstreet* because we had confidence in its emphasis upon gradual and moderate growth values over time." Really? That's the same as saying we respect *Overstreet* because we know that no matter how poorly our investment actually performs… and no matter how little it can really be sold for, we have confidence that the *Price Guide* will continue to publish higher prices in the hope that someone will purchase my now lousy investment for more than I did.

I don't know about anyone else, but the reason I've placed confidence in *Overstreet* over the years is that it is the ONLY price guide that has made any attempt to be ACCURATE!

Point #9 Craig states he's happy with Fine being 50% of NM because it restores "respect and value" to the Fine grade. Whew… are we now supposed to base comic prices on "respect" for a certain condition? I respect my father… and I price Fine condition books at what I think they really sell for. And if that happens to be 50% of NM, great. But I don't think many dealers are really selling many Silver Age comics in Fine for 50% of what they sell them for in NM.

In Craig's original text (edited somewhat for space in *CBM*'s published version), he then offers up Brian Johnson's comments about ACTUAL SALES. Now everyone listen up really carefully; THIS IS THE WAY IT'S SUPPOSED TO WORK! Using actual dealer sales figures is the best way to determine value and should be the basis of calculating spreads. When actual sales figures change, *Overstreet* should reflect these changes.

Point #10 Craig wonders if most of the dealers complaining of low FN sales were trying to sell overgraded books. I feel it doesn't matter because they WERE selling them a few years ago, and they were just as overgraded THEN.

My Final Point It's still my experience and the experience of those I trust and believe that truly NM books actually sell for 15-30x GD… especially keys. Fines bring 3-4x GD. It might be a reasonable idea to ignore NM sales since they are so few. Of course, if the proposed "dumbing-down" of grades goes through, everyone and their brother will have tons of "Near Mint" books for sale. But that's another *CBM* Forum.

But here's the bottom line… It seems to me that Craig and countless others want comics to be no-risk investments. This is unrealistic. I've always told people to buy what they enjoy and invest in stocks or real estate. It amazes me that collector/investors have no problem when their 200 shares of Coke plummets 25% in one month like it did this year but they go ballistic if their copy of *FF* #48 goes down at all. I see this all the time (I'm not talking about Craig here, incidentally). All collectibles are fragile investments at best… and everyone in the hobby would do better to remember that.

THE SLABBING GAME

Opinion by Bruce W. Edwards

After reading Michael Naiman's comments regarding the very probable coming existence of a "Third Party Grading" service, I could not resist adding my two cents worth along with some additional background which I hope will give us all pause.

Here are the primary theoretical benefits of a third party grading service: (1) Objective, disinterested party will evaluate and expertly grade the item; (2) The service would typically be made up of a panel of experienced experts (although this does not appear to be the case based on Michael Naiman's comments); (3) Give an opinion as to the authenticity and original (non-restored) state of an item; and (4) The above three points will allow the formulation of a more fluid market in collectibles, including "sight unseen" bidding by reputable dealers that will help to maintain market liquidity.

I think most collectors, dealers and investors would welcome the above three points if they could be achieved (although I do question how much a true collector could enjoy having his books if they were encapsulated… and unable to be inspected, the interior story and art unable to be read and enjoyed!).

I have collected coins, from ancient Greek, Roman, medieval, and modern world coins to all types of U.S. coins since 1971. I worked in the numismatic (coin collecting) business, first as a sales clerk and later as a store manager, from 1978 to 1985.

As for comics, I've read them since I was a child and have been actively collecting (post-childhood) since 1977. I've bought and sold comics since 1982, with my auctions (as many *CBM* readers know) starting up in 1985. I've been a member of the AACC grading committee for Sotheby's in 1993-96 and 1998.

Given the above coin and comic background, allow me to offer a few observations. There are several coin grading services in business today. The three dominant firms are PCGS, NGC and ANACS. They all exist to promote the four points outlined above in addition to making money for their owners (I am not aware of any of these services being nonprofit).

Since these coin grading services started, many have noted, including yours truly, a gradual change in grading standards (some would argue not so gradual). I for one, wonder how grades can change, since—once defined—the criteria for an item meeting a grade should not change. Most with hobby experience would agree that grading standards have become more lenient (the term is called "market grading" in the coin trade).

In other words, what ever can be "passed off" as an Extremely Fine 45 in the coin market is, therefore, an Extremely Fine 45. An example, which I am working from memory on, was in a recent issue of the weekly coin newspaper *Coin World* (I believe a late November or early December issue or close to it). An 1804 U.S. silver dollar (one of the most desired coins from the typical U.S. coin collector's view point) was originally graded in the late 1980s or early 1990s as an EF45 by PCGS. It was then graded, after a time, by NGC as an AU (Almost Uncirculated) 50. It was recently graded again by PCGS as an AU55!

This would be comparable to a *Detective* #27 originally receiving a grade of VF75 or 80 ending up as a NM95 after a few years!

While a grading service may prevent the most negligent over or undergrading, serious inconsistencies continually occur. Personally, I find the above example with the 1804 dollar both inexcusable and reprehensible, especially since the same grading service is not being consistent with its previous grade... and by an entire grade level!

Regardless of any service's grade guarantee, grading remains somewhat subjective, even given strict criteria for grading.

Even given a panel of respected experts, grades will sometimes vary widely. This has been the case during the Sotheby's grading sessions. Sometimes we are all within a few points... but sometimes we are off by 30 or more points from the highest to the lowest! (And, this is due to legitimate considerations by each grader.) I shudder to wonder how people, no matter how well intentioned, with little or no experience grading comics, will accurately assess a comic book's grade and be able to accurately detect restoration work... even the originality of some items.

A liquid market has not really been achieved in slabbed coins. Why? All knowledgeable coin dealers recognize that there are mistakes in the slabs as well as nice coins. Many no longer offer sight unseen bids and only make offers based on "sight seen" where they will decide if the coin meets their criteria for a grade (sounds pretty much like a market for non-slabbed coins). How is a comic book dealer (or collector) going to assess the paper quality and structural integrity of a "slabbed" comic? (They won't be able to.)

There has been a "slab game" going on in the coin market for several years. This occurs when people "break out" (remove from the slab) undergraded coins from the holders and resubmit them, hoping for... and frequently getting... a higher grade on the next try at the slab merry-go-round. Thus, as time goes by, a tendency towards overgrading marginal coins is occurring with all the nicer coins being broken out of the slab for a try at a higher grade. I hope the comic collecting hobby with think good and hard about the future implications of this trend. I also look forward to further comments on this topic in future issues of *CBM*.

NUTS!

Why Sotheby's will keep the 100 point comic book grading system intact for their 1999 auction. Opinion by Sotheby's consultant Jerry Weist

Change is Now... used to be one of my favorite lines from a Byrds song back when Crosby was still with Roger McQuinn and the '60s were in full force. Certainly within our own comic book market change is essential if we expect to enter into the 21st century with an expanding hobby instead of one that ages with the baby-boom generation. I want to state very clearly that though I will disagree with Bruce Hamilton, Jim Payette, and other members of the comic community who have come out in favor of the recent "Slab" and grading system, I have the highest regards for them as friends and professionals. I am not totally disagreeing with them—only in part, and my reasons are stated forthwith.

The "Slab" system (as I understand it) is essentially a fine idea for the commerce and basic day to day selling of rare comic books. Especially at a convention, or perhaps auction, or mail order situation it is almost ideal. This system is a fundamental evolutionary step-up from the excellent "Fortress" system that was designed and built by Chris Pedrin in California in the '80s. However, by creating a system that seals the comic book into the container, with the requirement that it be re-graded each time it is opened gives me some reservations. To begin with a comic BOOK (got that second word there?) is not a c-o-i-n. This "Slab" system is perfect for an object like a coin that can only be viewed on two sides under normal circumstances, or a stamp for that matter.

Can you imagine putting a first edition of Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (with the rare first state dust jacket) into a "Slab" system and then putting it on the shelf? Or how about your pristine copy of Miles Davis *Kind of Blue* album in the promotional release mint jacket? Or how about that near perfect fill 1966 Mouton Rothschild (which is drinking at its absolute apex right now!)... you say now don't be silly Jerry... who wants to "Slab" wine, or records, or books for that matter?!

That's just my point... a comic book collector is interested in the whole package. How many people do you know that collect comic book covers? If this were the case then the "Slab" system would be totally appropriate. I believe that basically collectors and buyers want to see the entire comic book when they buy the book and then after they buy the book when it is in their collection. Does this cause undue wear and loss of condition for Mint and Mile High comic books, and it is a major problem? Yes. However, for 90% of the comic books traded at the over $750 price range it is not a critical problem.

Will Sotheby's use the "Slab" system graded books if they come to auction? Yes. However if a prospective buyer wants to view the book, we will have to open and break the seal. I know of no serious buyer—from Steve Geppi, to Bruce Hamilton, to Steve Borock, to Dan Kramer, who would spend over $60,000 on a Fine Minus *Detective Comics* #27 without a serious inspection of the entire book. None of these individuals would feel safe buying the comic book in a "Slab" with the grade stated. To a man, each person would say... "fine I accept the grade, now let's open the slab so I can confirm for myself what is really going on with this book."

Would any of you do otherwise? So what we have is a system that will require dozens of re-seals and re-grades, at a cost each time—great for the company providing the service, huh? And what about the thousands of marginal rare books from the '50s, are they to be "slabbed" away as well? Well, time will tell. The market will out. (People said that no one

would come to Sotheby's and pay a 10-15% buyers' premium to BID on rare comics, and here we are now in our ninth year.)

I believe that the "Slab" system proposed is basically a good idea, and is the normal evolutionary step for rare comics in our present situation. However, I want to state that comic BOOKS are meant to be held and read. You cannot separate this basic fundamental fact, and ignore the differences between them and coins. The coin is perfect for the "Slab" system—the comic book presents its own problems.

Now to address the other side of this debate, the new, more simple, standard grading system that Bob Overstreet is going to format into his next annual guide. My fundamental response to this system is "nuts." The older folks reading this will remember the phrase used by an American general when deep inside Germany, with his troops surrounded by German forces he was asked to surrender in World War II. His response to the Germans was... "Nuts!"

I want to state very clearly when the 100 point grading system came out, I was hard pressed to adapt. It required a lot of work. It forced people to become very specific. One could no longer say, or use the phrase "Very Fine/Near Mint," one had to become very focused. I didn't like all this work. I was an "old dog" from the early days of comic book collecting, and wanted to know why we had to go to all this trouble.

Then I became the consultant to Sotheby's auctions and began to represent comic book collecting to a different professional crowd of new buyers. The 100 point grading system all of a sudden became paramount (just as the A.C.G. grading committee was) to bringing a sense of professional demeanor and trust into a hobby that had its problems and abuses from the past.

To define more clearly my point, try to imagine calling up Robert M. Parker, Jr. author of *Bordeaux*, editor for *The Wine Advocate* and many other fine books about wine. Robert Parker revolutionized the wine collecting world when he went up against the British system of rating wine and introduced the 100 point rating system. Imagine calling him, and suggesting that he back off from the 100 point system... because it is too complicated for wine collectors and buyers? Can you imagine his response? It would most likely go something like this... "To rate a wine as complex as the 1982 Petrus requires nothing less than a one hundred point system. If the French have spent nearly 350 years developing the culture and science of great wine making, it is the least that we can do to bring a clear and precise system of rating these wines to the public when we write about them as professionals." These quotes are imaginary, they do not come from Parker, they are my own opinion of what he would say—but they illustrate my point.

Everyone in comics has now agreed that grading comic books is COMPLEX, this debate is over. It is not a simple game. Everyone in comics would also agree that the old days when dealers and collectors alike could toss off the phrase VG+/Fine should be buried forever. Why then now, after adopting a very precise and scientific 100 point system would Bob Overstreet overturn such a system for a 10 point simplification?

For commerce I believe. "Slab" the book, give it a 10 point grading system, and new buyers will not be threatened by the "problems" inherent within the comic book collecting hobby. But collecting comic books is difficult. Just as buying fine wine, and storing it, and enjoying it at the right times later on in life require—time—effort—study—and patience. So too does our hobby of buying comic books, storing them properly, and enjoying them over time require that the individual invest some of their own effort and patience.

I believe that the 10 point and the 100 point systems are basically two sides of the same coin. Steve Fishler, Jim Payette, and a great many people who will use this system are true professionals, they know more about grading, and have had more experience with rare comic books than I ever will. Let me repeat, Fishler and Payette are more astute graders than I will ever be.

However, Sotheby's is going to continue to use the 100 point grading system for precisely the same reason that we are going to continue with A.C.G. grading committee. Full disclosure to buyers about restoration, having the confidence to be able to bid on a $20,000 comic book from England over the phone, and being able to analyze the comic from a color illustration—based on the catalogue description and an A.C.G. committee grade average from a 100 point grading system—these are all parts of a regime that was set up when comics came to Sotheby's and began to enter the international marketplace.

I would stand with Robert M. Parker at the moment and say... "Nuts!" to anyone that suggests my professional descriptions of comic books can be improved by adopting a less specific 10 point grading system and discarding the more precise 100 point grading system. Whether I'm cataloging a *Detective Comics* #27, or a copy of the Fawcett *The Man from Planet X*. Precision is better for collectors, consumers, investors, and everyone else in the hobby!

HEART OF THE HOBBY

Opinion by Bill Howard

As briefly referenced in the last issue of *CBM*, a small cadre of well-known dealers, including Steve Fischler of Metropolis Comics, Robert Rogovin of Four Color Comics, Joe Verenault of JHV Associates, Mark Wilson of World's Finest, Jim Payette of Payette Rare Books & Comics, and Bruce Hamilton of Another Rainbow/Gladstone, seem determined to launch a new grading system. They have done this with the overt endorsement of Bob Overstreet.

This new grading system would replace the traditional, much used, and tested 100-point version promulgated by Gary Carter and Bob Overstreet in the *Overstreet Comic Book Grading Guide*, First Edition. Recent events compel me to respond, both in my unofficial capacity as an avid, long-term collector, and my official capacity as vice president of the American Association of ComicBook Collectors (AACC), the world's largest comic book fan and collector organization.

I should note—from the start—that I have not spoken with the principals behind the new grading system. I invite them to write me with their version of the story, which I will be happy to publish, unexpurgated, in the next issue of the AACC Newsletter. I also encourage them to write to *CBM* in the hope that their response could be published for *Comic Book Marketplace*'s wider readership.

The attempt by this group to foist a new grading system on collectors is not inconsequential or trivial. The grading of comic books is at the very heart of our hobby. Grading is the fundamental mechanism used to set price. And, price, arguably more than scarcity or

demand, is the primary obstacle to most collectors. Any attempt to revise grading standards, especially by those who stand to profit from a more lax system, should be viewed—at the very least—with a healthy dose of skepticism. Why change something that has worked well for so long?

As a collector of memorabilia outside the comic hobby (e.g. vintage jazz albums, rare books, etc.) I can say with confidence that grading guidelines in our hobby, despite some basic difficulties, are better and more precise than other collectible segments. The basic nomenclature and 100-point grading system used today have stood the test of time, have been rigorously and ruthlessly tested in the market, and found adequate.

Despite what Bob Overstreet himself was recently quoted as saying, the 100-point grading system is widely in use by collectors and dealers, not to mention the AACC in its official capacity at Sotheby's and Christie's annual auctions. This is not to say the current system couldn't be improved. Many collectors, including myself, believe the 100-point system is overly complicated. After all, what's the real difference between a VF80 and a VF85? I feel that the current 100-point system, in use for so long now, should certainly be updated and expanded... but not replaced before the proposed changes are widely discussed by collectors and dealers.

Instead, the principals behind this new scheme have chosen to work behind closed doors, with very little effort made to solicit the collecting public's opinion. The motive behind the new grading scheme seems reasonable at first glance: to introduce new collectors to the hobby by simplifying the grading guidelines and turning over the grading of rare comics to a neutral third party. I say "seems reasonable," because a deeper reading of the issues at hand reveals it to be anything but.

Let's first review the basics of the new system, as I understand them. **1.** The current 100-point system would be replaced by a 10-point system. **2.** The so-called combination or split grade, of which the most notorious is VF/NM, would be assigned a higher whole number value. For example, and in the case of VF/NM, it would receive a numerical value of 9.0, instead of 8.5 or fractions in between. **3.** The split grade would be "officially" recognized as a valid nomenclature. **4.** Books would be turned over to a neutral third party grading service, graded, and then slabbed (encased in a lucite-like frame, like Chris Pedrin's Fortress). The final grade would, purportedly, be guaranteed by the grading service.

Point 1 I have little quarrel with a 10-point grading scale, although I think the differences are largely semantic. Collectors and dealers, obsessed with finding just the right grade, will most likely opt to use fractions anyway. Even with the nomenclature scale, pluses and minuses are the norm, not the exception. There's no real difference between a 6.50 on a 10-point scale and a 65 on a 100-point scale. Could a 10-point scale be abused more easily than the 100-point scale? Perception is often reality. 6.0 appears closer to a 7.0, than a 60 does to a 70. But, most collectors could live with this.

Point 2 I argued vigorously against combination or split grades in the May, 1998 issue of *CBM*, so I won't go into detail here (and, I know that Ye Editor shares my concerns in this regard). Simply stated, the not-so-benign purpose of a split grade is to raise the price of the comic book. Period. It has very little to do with finding a compromise between one grade and the next.

Don't believe me? Do your own anecdotal research. Pick up any copy of *CBM, CBG*, or dealer's mail order catalogue. Find a split grade and compare the asking price against the *Overstreet Comic Book Price Guide* for a comic book in the higher and lower condition of the split grade. In almost every case, the cost will be closer to the higher of the grades split.

At the top of the condition chart—again the notorious VF/NM—the final asking price will often be at a multiple of the NM price. Apparently, where split grades are concerned, the only compromise is in the condition grade. It's certainly not in the final asking price.

Point 3 Although split grading is widely used by dealers, it should be shunned by collectors who deserve better. Pluses and minuses, as well as the point spread between grades in the current 100-point system, are all more useful and accurate descriptors than the split grade.

The grader of a comic must take a stand with regard to condition. The comic is either in the Poor, Fair, Good, Very Good, Fine, Very Fine, or Near Mint ranges. Later, price can be set and negotiated accordingly. By giving official credence to split grades, we are inviting the sellers of comic books—collectors included—to be sloppier in their grading efforts. And any more sloppiness in a method that is already as much art as science, is not a good thing for the hobby.

Point 4 Grading services have had their biggest impact on the coin hobby. They offer the patina of objectivity and neutrality with respect to grading for both dealer and collector. In practice, with the patina rubbed off, this is often not the case. First, the grading services are "for profit" organizations. They have a vested interest in the final grade of all the material they review. According to coin collectors I have spoken with, the standards of the grading services in the coin segment have actually declined over time. I won't speculate as to the cause of this decline, except to say that where financial remuneration is solely tied to grading, mistakes... and worse... are bound to occur.

Second, comic books, unlike coins, present a difficult grading challenge. Like an NFL referee, a coin grader has only two sides to worry about. A comic book can have hundreds of pages requiring review. And paper collectibles are much more prone to wear and tear than a metal compound. That's why there are many more grading defects described in the literature related to comic books than there are to coins. This begs the question of how the grading services will "get smart" about grading comic books.

It has been rumored that one individual collector, with relatively little ACG committee grading experience, will be responsible for educating the grading services. Well, we all know that there is no substitute for experience when grading comic books. The notion that this one collector's grading prejudices and biases will form the foundation of a new system is patently unacceptable.

Worse, rumor has it the authors of the new grading system will dispense with the panel approach currently used by the coin grading services. The beauty of the AACC-sponsored grading panels at Sotheby's and Christie's has

been their reliance on a group of experts, as opposed to a single expert. On all lots graded, the high and low grades are thrown out, with the average grade of the rest of the panel used as the final grade.

This panel approach, especially with big books (where even a half grade can mean the difference of thousands of dollars to a buyer), helps to reduce (even eliminate) bias and any individual special interest. What guarantee will buyers from the new service have that the final grade, on which the price is based, won't reflect an individual's grading biases? This is no small point, since the books in question would be encased in plastic, unavailable for inspection.

Finally, there is the whole issue of "slabbing" a comic book in the first place. I don't know about you, but I would sure be reluctant to purchase a comic book I couldn't closely inspect first. With restoration increasingly the norm, the idea of purchasing an expensive, rare comic book—"sight unseen"—is a pretty scary proposition. I wonder how many collectors are willing to purchase a book they can't open and read, anyway? Again, this is no small question as the guarantee that accompanies a book graded by a grading service is null and void if the case is tampered with or opened.

I'd hope other collectors and dealers will voice their opinion about this important matter, especially the principals involved in promoting the changes in the present grading system. Only through rigorous, and sometimes skeptical, public discussion/examination of the issues will a new system get a fair hearing. Attempts to bully the market behind closed doors are a prescription for failure.

I would further suggest that *CBM*, because of its frequency and its emphasis on collecting, is the right forum for this important discussion. Publishing an article in the yearly *Overstreet Price Guide*—prior to public discussion—is precisely the wrong path to take. It gives credence to a system that I cannot endorse. Until its authors "come clean" with the details, I'm afraid I'll just have to say no. And I think so should the collecting public.

IN MEMORIAM

Vincent Sullivan

June 5, 1911 – February 3, 1999

Honored many times for many things, Vin Sullivan listed among his many other accomplishments, the editoral reins of *Action Comics* #1. Vin also made the decision to package Superman as the lead feature for that historic first issue in 1938. His amazing legacy also included the editorship of *Detective* #27, *Superman* #1, *Batman* #1, and a host of other key issues in comic history.

Vin started in the comics in 1935, as an artist doing covers and stories for *More Fun* and *New Adventure* (later to become *Adventure*), the two original material comics DC titles published by Malcolm Wheeler-Nicholson. When a third title, *Detective*, was added in 1937, Vin drew the first cover (Fu Manchu, that was for years credited to Creig Flessel). By then Nicholson had promoted Vin to editor, and he was riding herd over such talents as Creig Flessel and Sheldon Moldoff. A fourth title was scheduled, and Vin was still shopping for a lead feature. He wanted something for the upcoming *Action Comics* that would make it fly off the newsstand racks and really offer the readers a thrill for their dime.

Vin, of course, knew the work of Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster; he edited their strips: Slam Bradley in *Detective*, and Federal Men in *Adventure*, among others. But the boys from Cleveland had been peddling Superman to the strip syndicates (for five years!) so it wasn't until boy editor/artist/writer Sheldon Mayer got excited about the character that it was brought to Vin's attention. When he saw the strips he knew he had found the star of *Action Comics*.

The strips were cut up and pasted into comic pages. Joe Shuster drew a dynamic cover of Superman hoisting a car over his head while criminals flee. The superhero in comics was born, and the young industry received a huge burst of vitality that soon brought a host of new publishers as *Action*'s sales climbed into the stratosphere.

1939 was a banner year for DC (as the company now called itself) with three Vin-edited triumphs: The *New York World's Fair* comic—Vin having sold the Fair committee on the idea in late 1938, *Superman* #1 (no number)—the first comic to sell a million copies, and *Detective* #27—the first appearance of Batman. It also seems more than probable that Vin was the driving force behind such PR as the Supermen of America Club, and he definitely drew some of the art that appeared in the DC ads promoting the club.

Vin eventually left DC with the goal of publishing his own comics and soon founded Magazine Enterprises which produced the first romance comic (in 1946 with a Flessel cover), *Funnyman* (Siegel and Shuster's post-DC spoof-hero), and the only all-Frank Frazetta illustrated comic book, the awesome *Thun'da* #1, and *Ghost Rider*, among many other fine four-color titles.

Back in those days the printers wouldn't even start the presses for a run of less then 250,000 copies. Vin's best-seller was *Straight Arrow* which sold a million copies a month.

Before his death last week, at the age of 87, Vin was still working on comics related projects like Popeye Peanut Butter and an entertainment magazine with art by Creig Flessel and Joe Giella. Vin was honored publicly for the last time at the 1998 American Association of Comicbook Collector's annual dinner.

There might never have been a comic convention or comics fan magazines (as exemplified by *CBM*) had Superman not been picked by Vin to head up *Action Comics*. Fandom owes it all to Vin. He leaves as his legacy this wondeful four-color hobby that we all love.

—CHARLIE ROBERTS

CGC INTERVIEW

Continued from page 4

CARTER: *Two other questions posed by many collectors I've spoken with is "why certify comics at all" and "why is Comics Guaranty Corporation qualified to certify comics?"*

JOHN MABEN: There are many reasons to certify comic books. Perhaps most important, the market has progressed to a point in its development where many collectors and dealers agree it needs a unifying force to increase its appeal and enhance its consumer protection. A trusted, accurate, and consistent certification company will provide a new level of stability in one particular problem area, grading. There are as many ideas on how to grade accurately as there are people willing to give an opinion. CGC's goal is to unify the market behind a common standard of grading that falls within a reasonable distance of just about everyone's definition for a grade.

CGC is uniquely qualified to provide certification services because of the background of our management team. CGC has recruited its managers from Numismatic Guaranty Corporation (NGC), the leading grading company in coins.

NGC has provided a trusted third party opinion recognized as being synonymous with expertise, consistency and accuracy in grading coins. The management team at CGC will hire a group of comics professionals, lead by Primary Grader Steven Borock, to meet the unique needs required in bringing certification to the comic industry. We believe our proven certification expertise combined with top comics expertise, are the essential ingredients necessary to establish and maintain our position as the best grading service in comics.

CARTER: *How can you be sure that Steve Borock's individual grading standards are representative of the grading standards of an entire hobby?*

MABEN: No one individual's personal grading standards could possibly be representative of the grading standards for an entire hobby. However, it should be duly noted that it is not our intention in any way to adopt Steve Borock's personal grading standards for use as the CGC grading standard. It has always been our intention to solicit the collective grading opinions of respected collectors and dealers to approximate what the standard should be in order to best satisfy and serve the needs of all. With that in mind, we realize that not everyone will agree with the grades we assign to some comics. The very nature of grading itself is extremely subjective and would never allow complete agreement over an entire hobby. All CGC graders will have extensive prior experience in grading comics and will be instructed to assign each and every comic the highest possible grade it deserves in accordance with existing market standards.

CARTER: *Many collectors feel that there has not been enough disclosure, discussion, or discourse among the collector community concerning both the use of a new ten-point grading scale… and the process of encapsulation (slabbing).*

STUMP: First of all, we have only recently formed Comics Guaranty Corporation, and any discussions previous to the company's formation were for the purpose of investigating whether or not the market was ready for certification. Now, as we move to organize the company, and establish our policies and services, the interaction of collectors and professionals is our highest priority. We have already spoken with many dealers and collectors, and will speak with hundreds more before we open our doors.

In regards to the 10-point grading scale, I was present along with Bruce Hamilton, Steve Fishler, Bob Overstreet, and a select group of dealers and collectors when a discussion on the merits of a 10-point scale were debated. More recently, a group of seven prominent collectors and three CGC representatives gathered for a meeting to discuss certification in general, which included a discussion of the 10-point scale. In spite of the fact that a few concerns remained among a couple of forum participants, we believe that we addressed the majority of their concerns in a way that reassured them of our intentions. We will continue to speak with more collectors and dealers, but it is our intention to adopt the 10-point scale that is likely to be used by the *Overstreet Guide* in the year 2000. Because the market was moving in that direction, CGC wanted to move with the market.

CARTER: *What will the CGC holder be like?*

CARDONA: Our commitment to comics collectors is that our holder will set a new standard for archival quality that meets or exceeds the inert safety of mylar while greatly exceeding the capabilities of mylar in its ability to protect comic books from mishandling, accidents, and normal environmental effects. This may sound good, but we also had additional requirements for it to be extremely lightweight while retaining all of its protective strength, and sized to fit a magazine box for easy storage, transportation, and presentation. There are unique characteristics still in development that will provide other advantages for the collector.

CARTER: *Comic book collectors like to hold their books… read them. If you're encapsulating the book, won't they lose the ability to do this?*

MABEN: No. We recognized from the outset that a way to safely open the holder was important. Unlike encapsulated coins and cards, the CGC comic book holder will be openable. However, to protect the integrity of the certification and grade, the holder will be tamper-evident and a broken seal will easily be seen once opened. Opening the holder will therefore void the certified grade, but allow collectors to safely remove and view the book. CGC will offer a re-certification service for opened holders but the grade could change since, while not likely, improper handling could effect the condition. In most cases, you would not want to remove a book from its holder. But we can see situations where a buyer really wants to look at the whole book before he buys. In this case, the buyer and seller would agree beforehand that if the holder was opened but the book doesn't sell, then the re-certification fee would be paid by the buyer, the seller, or both. The re-certification fee will be slightly less than the normal fees, so long as the original CGC identification label is included along with the book. This is because we intend to give a credit for each label returned to us, to assist us in keeping our census report as accurate as possible.

CARTER: *We've heard talk about some sort of a census report. Could you discuss the report and its possible use to comic book collectors?*

STUMP: The CGC census report will simply be a summary of all the comic books graded by CGC according to title, issue number, and grade. These numbers will change, as more comic books are certified. Over time, it will give you a general idea as to the scarcity of comic books of certain types in certain grades.

BOROCK: For example, we may find that for unrestored *JoJo* #25s there may be 45 books in FN, 12 books in VF, 2 in VF/NM, and none in NM. If this number holds consistent over time, we can then infer that among books submitted to CGC, this is a rare book in VF/NM and so far non-exis-

tent in NM. But as a warning, even though the CGC census may indicate we've graded few *Red Sonja* vol. 3 #5s in VF, that would NOT be a definitive indication that the book is scarce. After a number of years, we may be surprised to find that some comics we thought slightly rare are in fact quite rare in higher grades, and that some we thought were extremely rare in VF were not as rare as we once thought. It is useful information, but information to be used carefully and responsibly by the comic book community.

STUMP: It's important to note that even one label not returned to us will throw off the accuracy of the census. This will happen, as it has happened in coins, so comics collectors should never read a CGC census report with the thought that it will be 100% accurate.

CARTER: *How will CGC maintain impartiality as a "third party" grading service... especially if it primarily services dealers and not collectors?*

MABEN: The assumption is that CGC certification will primarily benefit dealers and not collectors. We do not agree with that assumption. CGC will be an "arm's length" impartial third party because of our policy to prohibit employees and management from buying and selling comics commercially. Our grading process is designed to ensure complete anonymity for the submitter. Every book will be graded on its merits alone, as accurately and consistently as is possible. We believe that the hobby will benefit if we put our best effort into every book.

CARTER: *How would you respond to critics that might describe your company as a neophyte group with little or no interest in the comics themselves?*

BOROCK: I don't believe that CGC's statement to be "arm's length" and "impartial" should be misinterpreted to mean "uninterested." In my opinion, comics are the greatest collectible in the world. There is nothing that the CGC team would rather see than for the hobby to flourish. I'd say that one phone call to John, Dave, Ed, or myself should put that fear permanently to rest. These guys are seasoned pros who love comics, and I'm proud to be a major part of this team.

CARTER: *Would you describe what you do as a service for dealers or a service for collectors?*

MABEN: It has great features and appeal for both. Take the collector who is not an expert. Certification will provide an impartial expert opinion to comic book condition. This is valuable because it not only increases the collector's trust in the comic, but also in the dealer he buys from. And it's great for the dealers because it will allow them to offer books without having their grades questioned. Certification can increase confidence and trust between collectors and dealers. That's good for everyone.

CARTER: *Why would any collector who grades for themselves need a CGC certified comic book?*

BOROCK: For the books they own, it makes sense on a number of fronts. A main consideration will be the protection and storage strength of the CGC holder. For insurance purposes (fire, flood, and theft), the certification and grading can be a great help in recording their collection. For the books they buy, they can buy a CGC certified book with confidence, focusing less on checking the grade and more on locating the right book for their collection.

CARTER: *Will you be grading just Golden Age and Silver Age books?*
BOROCK: CGC will grade all comic books, including restored books.

John Maben, CGC President & Dave Stump, CGC Vice President.

CARTER: *How will you handle restored books?*

BOROCK: Unlike coins and cards, in comics there is a market for restored books. As part of the certification and grading fee, CGC will perform a restoration check. If there is some restoration, we plan on identifying the restoration both with a different color label and by a description of the degree of restoration (light, moderate, and extensive) and also whether it is Amateur (A) or Professional (P).

For example, a moderately restored (by a professional) *National Comics* #26 would have a colored label that is graded with the description "Apparent FN+/6.5 (Moderate-P)." This way, a buyer will always know exactly what he's buying with a CGC certified book. Whether a collector wants a pristine book, or a restored book, the choice will be clear with a CGC certified comic book.

CARTER: *How long will it take for you to certify and return books?*

CARDONA: Our estimated turnaround times will vary based on the value of the comic book, and the level of service chosen by the submitter. Our quickest tier, WalkThrough, will provide same day service. Express will be 3 to 5 working days. Standard will take 12-15 working days or less. And Economy will take 25-30 working days or less. We are also considering a "Modern" service that would cost less than Economy and make it attractive to submit lower value comics from the late '70s to present.

CARTER: *Do you think anyone would want to have a modern comic graded and encapsulated?*

STUMP: We believe that many of the collectors who currently pursue only modern comics do so with the same passion of those that are in pursuit of Silver Age and Golden Age comics. While their budgets may not be as large, I'd bet that they will still consider their hobby and collecting inter-

ests on an equal level of importance with that of their peers. If the price to certify a modern comic was prohibitive, we do not believe that the grading of modern comics would meet with much success. However, we are striving to make available a level of service that would be economically feasible for the collector of modern comic books.

Steven Borock, Primary Grader

CARTER: *How will you maintain the safety and security of books while they're at CGC?*

MABEN: In addition to state of the art security, vault storage, and a multi-million dollar insurance policy, the books will only be handled by professionals fully trained in the techniques of safely handling comic books. Once in our holder, the books will be correctly packaged and insured for return shipping to their submitter.

CARTER: *Many collectors have reported extremely disappointing transactions buying and selling comic books over the internet... because of hassles over grading. You stated in a previous discussion that you felt your grading service could help this problem. How?*

STUMP: The internet holds great promise for comic book collectors and dealers. With a trusted third party CGC opinion, and a sealed tamper-evident holder, buyers and sellers will have a new higher level of assurance when entering into transactions on the internet. Currently, the biggest challenge for Internet trading of comic books is the lack of confidence that you'll get what you pay for. With CGC certified comics, a buyer will have a much better idea of what to expect regarding the condition of the book they're buying. This will be a great advantage for buyers and sellers.

CARTER: *It sounds to me like only the highest-grade Golden Age and Silver Age books will be sent for certification.*

BOROCK: Absolutely not. While it's likely many of the books we grade will be Golden Age and Silver Age books of higher grades, many lower grade books will also benefit from certification. The absolute "condition" collector may even want to certify his new books! The advantages of holder protection, increased confidence in trading, and buyer demand apply equally to high grade and low grade books.

CARTER: *Who are the principles of CGC and what are their qualifications to grade comic books for the rest of us?*

MABEN: CGC is owned and operated by the same professionals behind the world's leading coin grading service and the fastest growing sportscard grading service. This proven expertise in successful certification is being applied to the unique challenges of the comic book market by CGC.

JOHN Maben is founder and President of CGC. He is will be assuming the role of managing partner. Known as one of the world's top coin grading experts, he is Vice President and a key member of the management team at NGC. During the early 1990s he acquired a love for comic books and a good working knowledge of the market while co-owner of a retail mail order comic book business. His CGC responsibilities are to oversee company operations.

DAVE Stump is founder and Vice President of CGC. He is the head of Marketing for NGC and SGC. His CGC responsibilities are to design and fulfill marketing and public relations programs and to assist CGC's President.

ED Cardona is Operations Manager of CGC. A former member of the NGC management team, he brings extensive experience in all aspects of a certification company's daily operations. His CGC responsibilities are to manage the day to day operations of the company and to assist the President and Vice President.

STEVEN Borock is the Primary Grader of CGC. A long-time collector, and former dealer, he is widely respected for his knowledge, ability, and integrity, bringing 20 years of grading experience to CGC. His CGC responsibilities are to provide a final grading opinion for each book submitted to the company, to uphold the highest standards of integrity and impartiality, and to perform some management duties.

CARTER: *Rumor has it that you guys have favorite books. What are your favorite comic books?*

MABEN: No question, my favorite is *Plastic Man* #1. In my opinion it's a great skull cover, and Jack Cole is one of my favorite artists. I owned the Edgar Church Mile High copy at one point, and it was blazingly beautiful.

STUMP: I've always loved *Classics Illustrated.* Maybe it's the classic stories they re-tell, or maybe it's the way they bring the stories to life in images. My favorite is "The Food of the Gods," with "Gulliver's Travels" a close second.

BOROCK: Anybody that knows me well, knows that it's a toss-up between the Edgar Church (Mile High) *More Fun* #52 I used to own, or the Edgar Church *Flash Comics* #1 that I now co-own. They're my favorite characters, extremely tough to find in unrestored high grade, and the artwork is great.

CARDONA: I love a lot of the old EC Horror comics. Things like *Tales of the Crypt, Vault of Horror,* and *Shock SuspenStories.* I am also a big fan of modern independents such as Dark Horse Publishing. For an absolute favorite I'd have to say it's the *Law Against Crime* #1 because it's such a wild cover. Shocking!

CARTER: *I hear CGC will be in the introduction to the next Overstreet annual. Some who saw the advance on the article have criticized it as a disguised commercial for your company.*

MABEN: The *Overstreet Guide* will introduce Comics Guaranty Corporation, discuss the benefits of comics certification, and detail the 10-point grading scale, in an article by Bruce Hamilton.

CARTER: *I look forward to continuing our discussion next issue. I know* CBM *readers will be interested in what you have to say.*

Don't forget... send in your CGC questions for the next issue of CBM!

CHILDHOOD'S END

DARKNESS FALLS

AFTERMATH

Smoking Gun *(Continued from page 22)*

and had always intended that to be the case. Four months after Gwen's death, all question of intent had been erased and the classic "fall" explanation proferred by the Goblin and the staff from then on was mere fluff!

Surely this heightens the tragedy to mythic levels, but fortunately for Peter, he was not aware of the truth, nor was the Goblin. Surely Osborn would have taunted Parker with this horrific knowledge if he were privy to the facts. It is sadly only the fans who bear the full weight of this truth.

What is even more disturbing, however, is the paragraph that follows, in which Conway and the others try to claim that there was no choice other than to kill off Gwen for the sake of the story. Since they couldn't marry Peter and Gwen, they say, it was "inescapable"—Gwen had to die. Not only is a glaring and desperate attempt to absolve themselves of creative responsibility in the eyes of fans, it brings up an even more disturbing question.

Was the writing staff so unable to think of any other potential avenues for the character's fate? Couldn't Gwen simply have left town, met someone else, gotten a job? Since when is a brutal demise the only alternative for a female character besides marriage? The misogynistic implications of this thinking are staggering.

After 25 years, the greatest mystery surrounding the death of Gwen Stacy is at last resolved. Although he may never know the grotesque truth, Spider-Man himself, our hero, Peter Parker, killed the woman he loved while trying to save her life. Now that this has been settled for all time, new and even more troubling questions have been raised, but that debate is for another time.

"SPIDER'S WEB

SEND YOUR LETTERS TO: THE MARVEL COMICS GROUP, 387 PARK AVENUE SOUTH, NEW YORK, N. Y. 10016

Dear Gerry and group,

Shocking but necessary. I think you've done the right thing. The story line needed to be changed. I don't mean to imply that I was pleased, but Gwen Stacy was always too perfect a character, and that part of the mag was stagnant. Just the same, it is tragic. You shouldn't work a relationship like that into the story line again unless you're prepared to consummate it.

The question now is, what happens to Spidey? I hope it will be a true turning point, not just the removal of a central character.

Kip Hitz
4777 Oakes Rd. Dayton, Ohio 45426

Dear Marvel,

Okay, Conway, I've said it before and I'll say it again. You're a good writer, but you're just not good enough for SPIDER-MAN. The atrocity you commited in issue #121 was only the latest of your crimes. You must be taken off this magazine!

And would you mind explaining one thing? What do you mean by claiming that a fall from that height would kill anyone before they struck the ground? Everyday skydivers fall that distance and further before their chutes open. It doesn't kill them. I myself have fallen that distance skydiving and I'm still around.

So not only do you kill Gwen Stacy, you kill her in a way that doesn't make sense. And, even if there is some scientific explanation which I do not grasp, than half of the characters in Marvel Comics should be dead, because they are always falling from such heights and being saved at the last minute. Marvel Comics seem to be getting less consistent every month, and your consistency used to be one of the greatest things about Marvel.

I am disgusted with all of you for letting issue #121 happen.

Richard Nathan
5307 Sepulveda Blvd. Van Nuys, Calif. 91401

Dear Persons,

Thank you for taking my advice. I didn't expect you to, and I certainly didn't expect you to follow my suggestion in such a drastic manner. A few issues ago, I wrote you a brief letter concerning Peter Parker's journalistic career, and at the end, I tossed off a post-script requesting that you get rid of Marvel's prize twerp, Gwen Stacy. And in SPIDER-MAN #121, you did it. Congratulations on a good move.

Of course when I saw the cover, I was making all sorts of guesses. I knew the Green Goblin would be the villain, so I suspected you'd kill off Norman Osborn. You can only give a person amnesia so many times (it was already getting monotonous). then there's always Aunt May, who's been tottering on the brink of death with a strong tail-wind ever since SPIDEY #1. A thought even occured to my brain that you might kick off J.J.J. just for laughs. I never imagined you could actually kill Gwen. You have more intelligence than I gave you credit for.

I fervently hope Gwen doesn't make a miraculous recovery in #122 (or in any subsequent issues). I also hope Peter doesn't mourn her too long. Even though he was stupidly in love with her, how long can he grieve over a person whose brain was constructed entirely out of old Pepsi bottles, and whose personality had the exact color, consistency, and flavor of a loaf of Wonder Bread?

As long as we're discussing the women in Peter's mag, do not *ever* have Mary Jane Watson fall in love with Harry! Of course M.J.'s immature (so is Harry; he's the one on LSD), but that doesn't mean she hates men. She just doesn't want any short-haired, neurotic, spoiled acid-head (or even a well-adjusted dude) trying to own her. Keep her independent, but do develop her personality. You people haven't yet gotten over the notion that the way to give a female character personality is to give her a romance. We know M.J. isn't made out of Wonder Bread and mayonnaise like a certain happily-departed blonde-brain, but what is she made of?

Jane C. Hollingsworth
1415 East Second St.
Port Angeles, Wash. 98362

And there you have it. Solemn acceptance. Fierce anger. Ebullient joy. A sampling of the maddening wide spectrum of response to the death of Gwen Stacy in SPIDER-MAN #121.

At this point, we feel obliged to take a paragraph or two to explain a few points of contention:

First, for the many who wrote and complained that the fall alone could not have killed Gwen if she were unconscious (and therefore unable to be scared to death, the usual explanation for a person dying before hitting the ground), it saddens us to have to say that the whiplash effect she underwent when Spidey's webbing stopped her so suddenly was, in fact, what killed her. In short, it was impossible for Peter to save her. He couldn't have swung down in time; the action he did take resulted in her death; if he had done nothing, she still would certainly have perished. There was no way out.

Secondly, the why of it all. We gotta be honest and admit that it wasn't Gerry's idea alone. Kip Hitz is very close when, in his letter above, he calls it "necessary". Gerry had been reading over the past few years' issues and had come to the conclusion that something was wrong—or, more accurately, missing. The relationship between Pete and Gwen had been through a lot of inconsequential ups and downs, and unless the two were to be married, there was nowhere else to take it. But marriage seemed wrong, too. Peter just wasn't ready.

So Gerry, Roy, and Stan debated the question long and hard... and it turned out that all had reached the same inescapable conclusion. Gwen's death was simply fated to happen.

We've said before that our stories just seem to write themselves, that we often don't have any control over them. This was such a case. Events had shaped themselves in such a way that their only logical resolution was tragedy. And the rest, as they say, is history.

So don't blame Gerry. Don' blame Stan. Don't blame anyone. Only the inscrutable, inexorable workings of circumstances are culpable this time.

And no one regrets it more than we. It was a hard, hard story to write.

'Nuff said!

DEATH'S HEAD REVISITED

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

YOU'RE THE [illegible] PERSON I'VE EVER [illegible] PETE.
I THINK THAT'S WHAT MAKES YOU SO [illegible].
YOU ALWAYS LOOK LIKE YOU'RE GOING TO [illegible] LIKE A CHARLIE BROWN WHO'S JUST HAD THE FOOTBALL JERKED AWAY FROM HIM.

Although she was far more flighty than Gwen, Mj nurtured some secrets (not the least of which was her knowledge of Peter's double identity). Her presence eased Peter's grief over the next few years and led to one of the happiest events in his young life

THE MICHAEL NAIMAN REPORT

The Fourth "D"

Before we know it, everyone will be talking about "20th Century Collectibles." You remember those inexpensive, four color magazines printed on cheap paper that we used to read? Sure you do! You bought them in drugstores, supermarkets and on newsstands. Today, the only place you'll find them on the street (other than conventions) is in an ever shrinking population of comic specialty stores.

The Boomer Generation has enthusiastically supported and financially underwritten the comic collecting hobby for the last 30 years. As the Boomers enter their middle age years, we may begin to see a change in the influence that these folks currently wield over the hobby. More and more collections will begin to be liquidated in the marketplace as they become subject to what Diamond Galleries' John K. Snyder, Jr. has coined "The Three Ds"... Death, Divorce and Debt.

As more product appears, prices will certainly be influenced (re: stabilized) by the potential of over-supply. Mid-grade Silver Age, the Boomers' "collectible of choice," will probably be the preeminent item in the marketplace.

I would like to add another more positive spin to John's perspective by adding a fourth "D"... Diversity! As collectors either complete their runs (or cannot afford to complete their runs) they begin to look around at what else might compliment their collection. What you'll find is a vast array of comparatively inexpensive items that will add a richness to your compilation of comics. Besides the booming and extremely healthy "under a hundred dollars" comic book market, there's toys, original art, BLBs, pulps, premiums, rings, advertising memorabilia, buttons, figurines... they're all out there waiting for you to discover them! Sure, there will always be high end pricey items, however, the vast majority is well within most collectors' financial reach.

Where will you find them? Auction houses, antique dealers and toy magazines are a good place to start looking. And unlike mylar-protected comics, most of these articles can be held, shared, and passed around without fear of smudging a cover or bending a page

If you want to stay specialized in comic books, try looking at the non-superhero genre for a change of pace. We understand that the foundation of the hobby was built upon the testosterone-driven, spandex-clad, power fantasy superhero. That is where all the "money books" will always be based. But, are you in the hobby only for the money? Once again, the "D" word... Diversity... applies.

There are still tons of books available that are both scarce AND inexpensive in all grades! These books feature generally great storytelling and fabulous art. The Four Color Series is one place to start looking. Don't tell me you can't find anything to interest yourself with over 1,300 issues to choose from... and all with extremely diverse contents! For my money, the best titles are any Barks Donald Duck, Little Lulu, Uncle Scrooge, Ruff & Reddy (Hanna-Barbera's first title), and Pogo. If you are a dyed-in-the-wool TV freak, you have an amazing choice of knockout covers that start with Bonanza, Lucy, and Lassie... and go all the way to Rawhide, 77 Sunset Strip, and Zorro.

Once you've explored the Four Color series, why not take a look at Little Archie, Sad Sack, Little Hot Stuff, March of Comics, Richie Rich, Adventures of Jerry Lewis/Bob Hope, Casper, or Little Dot? For relatively little money you can collect the majority of these books and become an expert in these genres! Here's a chance to remove your nose from the "Dow Jones" approach to comic books and enjoy this great hobby for its wonderful diversity!

As Lon Webb of Dark Adventure Comics has observed, "Most hobbyists are buying what they enjoy when they find it at a reasonable price. This is one reason trends are so hard *(Cont. on page 66)*

MARKET REPORTS

JASON EWERT
VINTAGE INVESTMENT ASSOCIATES
PO BOX 354
EASTPOINTE, MI 48021
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The following are market realities for us: (1) Truly high grade Silver and Bronze Age sells remarkably well at over Guide, particularly for books that have a catalog value of less than $300; (2) All other grades of Silver Age sell briskly at @50% below Overstreet grade for Guide; (3) We are gradually beginning to see some signs of life in bigger ticket, high grade Silver Age items; and (4) Dells, Disneys, and all Golden Age are dead, deader, deadest, respectively.

Larger sales: Amazing Spider-Man #14 VF+ $1,400, #20 NM- $435, #28 VF/NM $150, Atom #2 FN+ $125, #29 VF/NM $160; Detective #38 PR $995; Fantastic Four #1 VF/VF+ $7500, #3 appNM $750, FF Annual #1 NM $900; House of Secrets #1 GD+ $225; Incredible Hulk #6 AppVF $400; Marvel Mystery #100 App GD $650; More Fun #23 GD $285, #34 GD+ $285; Spy Smasher #1 FR $250; Stars and Stripes #2 (#1) FR $150#3 FR $100; Tales of Suspense #39 NM $6500, #41 VF/NM $650; Tales to Astonish #44 appVF $400; World's Finest #71 AppFN- $495

Other sales: Action #400 NM- $12; Adventure #439 NM $17; Amazing Spider-Man #4 FR/GD $65, #11 FR $25,#12 GD+ $30, #19 FR/GD $18, #22 VG+ $38, #31 FN $90, #44 FN/VF $29, #96 NM- $75, #122 VG/FN $24, #129 VG $15, #151 VG/FN $2, #161 VF $4, #164 NM $10, #180 VG+ $2.50; Aquaman #23 GD/VG $4.50; Avengers #29 FR/GD $3, #83 VF $7.50, #98 VG/FN $4, Avengers Special #5 GD $1, #7 VF+ $5. *(Continued on page 66)*

◆◆ CBM MarketWatch ◆◆

A report of market indicator sales (including % of Guide) by Michael Naiman

A.Lincoln Life Story
#1 VF $40....Guide

Action
#199 GD+ $45 1.31X
#217 FN $37 45%
#238 VG $17 20%
#241 VF $168 1.53X
#248 GD $36 2.11X
#148 VG+ $83 @1.01X

Adv. Into the Unknown
#14 GD $28 1.5X

Adventure
#241 VG $18 88%
#290 FN- $19 39%

Air Fighters
#V2#2 FR $45 1.2X

Airboy
#V8#7 FN $34 94%

All-American
#102 NM "$1,070" 71%

All-Flash
#1 FR $500 83%

Amazing Adult Fantasy
#9 VG $49 64%

Amazing Fantasy
#15 GD $785 71%

Amazing Spider-Man
#4 FN $981 68%
#6 FR $65 1.23X
#7 VG+ $89 67%
#7 GD+ $100 1.52X
#8 FN+ $188 95%
#8 GD $50 76%
#11 VF $196 66%
#14 FN+ $550 1.47X
#14 FN+ $644 1.72X
#17 FN $134 95%
#20 FN $195 1.3X
#21 NM- $235 98%
#22 VF+ $157 1.10X
#39 VF $62 63%
#33 GD $15 Guide
#36 GD $15 Guide
#50 VG $23 33%
#122 NM.. $135 1.13X
#136 NM.. $35 Guide

Animal Comics
#24 VG $15 1.07X

Annie Oakley
#1 VF $275 1.34X

Aquaman
#1 GD+ $46 81%

Archie's Girls Betty & Veronica
#1 GD $140 1.06X

AstroBoy
#1 VG $70 90%

Avengers
#1 FN+ $650 1.23X
#1 VG+ $550 1.42X
#1 VF $92 44%
#54 VF $18 44%
#57 VF $98 1.46X
#58 NM $15 68%

Baffling Mysteries
#6 VG+ $110 2.34X

Bat Masterson
#4 VF $17 44%
#6 VF $17 44%

Batman
#8 FR $150 91%
#20 VG $150 1.15X
#80 FR $45 2.32X
#134 VG $52 44%
#137 VG+ $52 44%
#232 NM $70 91%

Batman Family
#1 NM $29 1.83X

Battle Ground
#1 VG $12 1.13X

Black Cat
#1 FN $210 1.4X

Black Magic
#2 GD $15 71%

Black Terror
#01 FR $750 1.15X

Bozo
#6 FN $21 70%

Brave & Bold
#3 FR $25 87%
#23 VG $39 50%
#28 FR $108 55%
#31 FN $43 46%
#42 VG $26 93%
#44 VG $26 1.08X
#47 FN $31 1.72X

Canteen Kate
#3 VG $125 1.56X

Captain Battle
#3 GD $60 1.07X

Cave Girl
#11 FN $110 92%

Commander Battle & the Atomic Sub
#3 GD $11 42%

Crack
#54 GD $16 91%

Crime and Punishment
#1 VF $135.....1.06X

Crime Reporter
#2 GD+ $75 1.99X

Cyclone Comics
#1 FN.....$450.....1.42X

Dagar, Desert Hawk
#23 GD $60 1.54X

Daredevil
#1 VG $188 61%
#3 VG- $68 1.07X
#3 VF+ $242 1.09X
#27 VG $50 74%
#28 FN $56 56%
#91 VG $8 51%

Detective
#45 FN $741 91%
#174 VG $130 1.35X
#175 VG $190 1.95X
#229 VG+ $60 75%
#234 GD $25 83%
#235 VF $160 45%
#268 VG $16 44%
#287 FN $34 Guide
#371 VF $30 1.03X

Diary Loves
#15 VG $3 20%

Dobie Gillis
#14 FN $92 Guide

Don Winslow of the Navy
#5 FN+ $16 59%

Double Life of Private Strong
#2 GD $9 28%

Gene (Avon)
#9 GD $98 1.03X

Exciting
#2 VF $500 2.03X

Fantastic Four
#1 GD $751 Guide
#3 FN $494 57%
#11 VF $48 83%
#12 VF $92 44%
#3 GD $9 Guide
#3 VG $31 44%
#4 VG $52 1.18X
#4 VG+ $130 1.40X
#4 VG+ $45 44%
#54 VF+ $31 Guide
#57 VG+ $15 44%
#8 FN $4 57%
#11 VF $36 44%

Fast Fiction
#1 FR $20 1.17X

Fighting American
#2 GD $30 44%

Fighting Yank
#5 NM $190 2.13X
#23 VG $250 3.47X

Foxhole
#3 GD $11 1.04X

Gene Autry
#6 VG+ $19 95%

Haunt of Fear
#15#1 GD $250 1.09X

Ibis
#3 FN $120 1.09X

Jughead
#9 VF $50 Guide
#12 FN $35 74%
#14 VG $20 71%

JLA
#5 VG $75 1.2X
#56 VF $15 88%

Mister Mystery
#13 GD.....$50.....1.92X

Our Army at War
#155 VF $45 87%

Rangers
#24 VG $36 76%
#61 FN $26 81%

Sea Devils
#1 FN- $59 48%

Showcase
#9 FR $174 59%
#21 VG $37 44%
#22 GD+ $220 79%
#32 VF $137 57%
#35 VF $266 59%
#36 GD+ $36 84%
#40 FN $53 61%
#47 FN $31 1.15X
#78 VF $10 56%

Star Spangled War Stories
#25 FN.....$55....Guide
#67 FN $22.....1.04X

Strange Suspense Stories
#20 FR .....$15....Guide

Tales of Suspense
#13 GD $20 83%
#40 VF $545 73%

Tales to Astonish
#4 FR $20 Guide
#14 FR $19 Guide
#27 FN $468 64%

Tim Holt
#17 VF $170 1.10X

Weird Terror
#11 GD.....$26....Guide

Western Hero
#78 VG $15 55%
#83 VG $15 66%
#84 VG $15 63%

Werewolf by Night
#1 NM $40 Guide

MARKET REPORTS

Continued from page 64

Batman #185 FR $4, #243 GD+ $2.50, #305 NM $10; Captain America #111 VG+ $7; Captain Marvel #25 VG/FN $2.50; Conan #23 VG/FN $4; Doctor Strange #172 FN/FN+ $7.50, #175 VG- $3, #183 VG $4; #111 VG+ $22.50; Fantastic Four #155 FN $2.50, #155 FN/FN+ $3; Four Color #645 FN- $14, #1167 FN $20; Ghost #3 FR/GD $25; Giant-Size Avengers #3 VG+ $1.50, #5 VF $3; Giant-Size Chillers #1 VF+ $10; Giant-Size Doctor Strange #1 NM $22; Giant-Size Spider-Man #1 NM $40; Green Lantern #15 FN/VF $60.

Incredible Hulk #131 VF+ $7, Special #1 VF $55; Iron Fist #1 VG $3, #2 FN/VF $6; Iron Man #1 FN $75; JLA #14 VF- $72.50; MAD #16 FR+ $37, #24 FR $90; Marvel Tales #111 FR $30; Men's Adventures #14 FR $9; Mystical Tales #6 VF- $62.50, #7 VF+ $62.50; Rip Hunter #23 VF/NM $44, #26 VF+ $40.

Silver Surfer #5 VF $65, #10 VF- $56; Skyman #1 FR $68; Spirit #3 FR $19; Sport Stars #1 GD+ $42; Sub-Mariner #8 VF $40; Superboy #103 NM- $50; Super-Magic #1 FR $90; Tales to Astonish #10 VG/FN $75, #15 FN/VF $100, #18 FN $55, #35 FR/GD $50; Thor #164, #167, #179, #171 NM $30 each.

NAIMAN REPORT CONTINUED

to track because this practice of spot and impulse buying is the trend that is usually not considered. Many times a trend will be reported which will result in an immediate "jump off" by hobbyists and a "jump on" by investors and dealers. Nowadays, it is plain to see why dealers and investors believe they create and drive the market... when in actuality it is the hobbyists who do so (this is why dealers and investors are forever scratching their heads and making false starts).

It is the hobbyists' buying power which controls the market, whether anyone likes it or not. I feel this is the fatal flaw in the long range plans of some to transform the hobby into a high end-investor's market... without regard to the 80% of comic buyers (and 90% of the comics) which do not fit into that category. Once the "economic mainstream" is alienated (the collectors this industry is based upon), do not be surprised when you have no industry left, with the exception of dealers and investors trading to each other in an incestuous aristocracy.

And speaking of having no industry left... at the beginning of 1998, San Diego (the nation's 6th largest city and 11th largest metropolitan area) had 18 retail comic specialty stores. As 1999 begins, we have seen the closing of 3 of these stores and the downsizing of another. With competition from video games, movies and on-line services threatening the comic retailer, when will comic book publishers realize that everyone involved in the business—publisher-distributor-retailer— must share the risk of bringing affordable entertainment to the public. I don't think retailers can survive when they are deluged with inferior, overpriced, multi-variant product featuring copy-cat pin-up artists who must illustrate never ending go-nowhere story arcs!

In order to survive, comic books must have a higher visibility factor in well traveled public venues and be priced at an affordable rate. I've always been a proponent that comics should be used as "shut-me-ups" for little Johnny or Sally. Mom or Dad should be able to grab an inexpensive book off the counter at the supermarket, drugstore, book shop, convenience or department store... shove it into the little screamer's hands... and introduce them to the concept of entertaining onesself by reading. When it's bedtime for the kids, take time out and enjoy a book or comic together.

All members of the industry, collectors included, should get together for a dialogue so that a workable solution can be found that would be fair and profitable to all parties. Failure to do so will result in our 21st Century brethren looking back and wondering what all the hubbub was about those fragile, brittle and crumbling paper relics of the 20th Century called comic books. ■

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The traditional holiday sales boom seemed to get off to a slow start this year, but gained considerable momentum in the latter half of December, finishing with extremely brisk sales in virtually every product category. (Sales figures that follow include sales from the two stores, as well as sales from our website and ebay online auctions.)

Overall, we are still seeing a rather sluggish market for mid-grade Golden Age (especially DC and Fawcett titles), with only pre-Code horror and crime books consistently bucking the trend and selling in ANY condition!

Golden Age sales: Archie Annual #1 FN+ $950; Eerie #1 (1951) VG $200; Exciting #26 VF $275; Fight #61 VF+ $175; Jumbo #92 NM- $175; Jungle #115 NM $150; Miss Beverly Hills of Hollywood #2 NM- $275; Rangers #4 VF $375; Superman #11 VG+ $300.

Our best selling Silver Age category continues to be our 50% off section, featuring low and mid grade Silver Age books at half graded Overstreet (this started off as a way to move the low grade material that accumulates as a by-product of purchasing collections, but has been so successful that we now actively pursue low grade product).

Silver Age sales: Amazing Adult Fantasy #8-13 average grade VF as a lot $1500; Hulk #3 G+ $135; Hulk #4 VG $200; Marvelmania Color Catalog NM-$100; Marvelmania B&W Catalog NM $75; Marvel Tales #2 VF $62.

Esoteric Bronze Age (1970's) books in extremely high grade continue to sell, while their more common or blemished cousins gather dust. It also seems that the demand for some 1970's titles, specifically war and horror, is spilling over to include the issues published in the 1980s... but again, only in extremely high grade.

Bronze Age sales: Batman #234 NM- $125; Conan #1 VF $100; DC 100 Page Super Spectacular #4 VG $28; DC Limited Collectors Edition Treasury C-20 Rudolph FN, traded for NM- GS X-men #1; Hulk #181 VF- $300; Kamandi #1 NM $10 (website special, sold 117 copies); New Gods #1 NM $50; Superman /Muhammed Ali Treasury NM $20 (website special, sold 67 copies).

Original art continues *(Cont. on page 68)*

TED HAKE - HAKE'S AMERICANA

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1998 TOP 100

Since 1967, Ted Hake's Americana & Collectibles auction house has been first and foremost in the field of character collectibles. Covering all areas of 20th century memorabilia, the five annual auctions each offer over 3,200 items all pictured and accurately described with an estimated value. Hake's will send any *CBM* reader a free sample of their next catalogue.

1. Marvel Bunny 1946 boxed statuette by Ker-Kali Plastics $4,400
2. Mickey Mouse Magazine 1st issue June-Aug. 1935 (FN) $3,019
3. Playboy Magazine 1st twelve issues bound (FN) $3,000
4. Funny Face Fun Book complete original art $3,000
5. Scarecrow of Oz c. 1915 book advertising button $2,969
6. Capt Marvel 1946 Fawcett premium figure (restored) $2,875
7. Orphan Annie Secret Guard initial ring $2,800
8. Orphan Annie Secret Guard magnifying ring $2,775
9. Lone Ranger Dell Comic #71 cover art $2,698
10. Son of Tarzan/Mystic Order 1920 movie button $2,583
11. The Shadow Movie Club button $2,455
12. Mickey Mouse Emerson radio $2,400
13. Two Wizard of Oz handkerchiefs c. 1940 $2,052
14. Mickey Mouse 1930's Scatter Ball game $2,014
15. Mickey Mouse English Ingersoll 1930's pocketwatch box $1,984
16. Disney Easter Parade boxed Fisher-Price toys $1,949
17. Buck Rogers 1935 Ingraham pocketwatch $1,905
18. Lone Ranger Dell Comic Book #62 cover art $1,905
19. Dick Tracy Walter H. Johnson Co. candy sign $1,846
20. Tom Mix 1934 Ingersoll pocketwatch (replaced hands) $1,840
21. Lone Ranger Meteorite ring $1,822
22. Hopalong Cassidy Cookies flat (unused) box $1,751
23. Disneykins TV Scenes twelve set counter display $1,737
24. Superman 1948 beanie (1 of 3 propellers missing) $1,656
25. Wilma Deering 1936 Cream of Wheat brass pendant $1,637
26. Tarzan Vita Hearts 1930's club button $1,621
27. Captain Marvel compass ring $1,582
28. Roy Rogers beanie with button & mailer $1,555
29. Howdy Doody six plaster figures paint kit $1,529
30. Junior Justice Society 1948 member kit $1,522
31. Capt. Marvel Jr. 1946 Fawcett Comics premium statue (restored) $1,508
32. Mickey Mouse 4-1/2" size Fun-E-Flex figure $1,508
33. Oz Waddle Book figures & ramp (missing Dorothy) $1,500
34. Dick Tracy Caramels box wrapper $1,440
35. Hopalong Cassidy Burry's Cookies (12) tin badges $1,428
36. Wonder Woman 1942 Sensation Comics club button (small dent) $1,334
37. Superman 1948 Columbia Pictures pressbook $1,329
38. Dr. Pill (of Little Nemo) bisque toothbrush holder (Fine) $1,323
39. Joe Louis silver portrait ring $1,323
40. Sgt. Preston of the Yukon 1956 celluloid 1-1/4" button $1,323
41. Kellogg's Pep "Real Photos" poster with Superman illustration $1,316
42. Terry & The Pirates "Genghis Khan" Libby Foods premium book $1,296
43. Buck Rogers 1945 three puzzle set boxed $1,270
44. Schoenhut Humpty Dumpty Circus tent & 5 figures (Fine) $1,265
45. Mickey Mouse 1930's French Bayard clock boxed $1,260
46. Mickey/Minnie Mouse 1930's European large tin box $1,179
47. Superman Gum Inc. 1940 brass badge $1,150
48. Pinocchio Victor Records 1940 button $1,132
49. Mickey Mouse English Ingersoll 1934 pocketwatch $1,122
50. Shmoo ceramic salt & pepper set $1,114
51. Buck Rogers 1933 Solar System map from Cocomalt $1,104
52. Mickey Mouse 7-1/2" wood jointed doll with "Lollipop" hands $1,096
53. Terry's Plane Spotter 1942 Libby Foods display $1,080
54. Dick Tracy Cartoon Show 1961 Chicago TV sign $1,079
55. 101 Dalmatians figures (10) by Enesco $1,065
56. Lone Ranger c. 1957 General Mills cereal standee (FN) $1,050
57. Superman of America 1955 member kit $1,048
58. Popeye Puppet Show 1936 punch-out by Pleasure Books $1,045
59. Roy Rogers' Medals store sign with set of 27 medals $1,035
60. Orphan Annie 1931 Ovaltine vote button $1,019
61. Donald Duck Comic Paint Book Dell #20 (VG) $1,001
62. Popeye's Eugene the Jeep 1935 composition 13" doll $1,000
63. Roy Rogers/Quaker Oats' 1948 contest poster $1,000
64. 1st Mickey Mouse Book by Bibo & Lang (VG) $1,000
65. Funny Face Drink Mix five masks $1,000
66. Dick Tracy 1930's composition 13-1/2" doll $994
67. Howdy Doody Jack-In-Box ring $993
68. Phantom Club Australian member's button $986
69. Sears' Christmas Comic 1943 promotional flyer & comic $978
70. Buck Rogers' 1933 cut-out book (complete but cut) $966
71. Roy Rogers' cereal wrapper with button offer $963
72. Blue Coal 1930's metal store sign $952
73. Superman 1946 Acme viewer/film set $929
74. Tom Mix girl's 1936 charm bracelet $926
75. Wild Wild West lunch box $926
76. Dick Tracy Philadelphia Inquirer Rotocomic button $914
77. Green Hornet 1966 whistle from Chicken of the Sea $908
78. Felix German composition candy container $903
79. Mickey Mouse gum card album with 44 of first 48 cards $894
80. Outcault Sunday World newspaper 1896 poster $888
81. Tarzan Jungle Map & Hunt Game 1933 Pepsodent Australian version $877
82. Superman "Daily In Democrat" newspaper button (Good) $865
83. Sylvania TV Buck Rogers' associated glowing light bulb ring, 1953 (FN) $864
84. Jimmie Allen Commander Canadian brass badge (FN)$862
85. Popeye Lucky Jeep 1936 fortune toy with box (FN) $858
86. Mickey/Minnie 1930s German bisque/wire figures $850
87. Detective Thrillers 1933 sample 1st issue from Library of Congress (Fine) $840
88. Capt. Midnight Flight Commander 1957 signet ring $840
89. Mickey/Minnie German six-piece bisque band set (one damaged) $834
90. Superman creator Siegel letter with carbon copy manuscript for eight weeks of 1940 daily strips (FN) $828
91. Shadow Blue Coal ring envelope (VG) $827
92. Tarzan's Grip 1930's button for Australian glue product $816
93. Shirley Temple 1930's Beret Club button $815
94. Captain Midnight 1946 Mystic Sun God ring (Fine) $810
95. Roy Rogers' "Official Telescope" in box $807
96. Roy Rogers' set of 12 Sugar Crisp cereal 3-D cards with glasses $805
97. Dick Tracy Hatfull of Fun store sign $794
98. Mickey & Minnie 1930s large wood clothing rack $794
99. Shirley Temple & dog diecut plaster wall plaque $791
100. Mickey & Donald twelve sterling rings on Ingersoll c. 1948 countertop display $780

Continued from page 66

to gain in popularity, with more new collectors entering the market every day, and demand for 1960's fanzines seems to be back on the rise. This month, we've included sales figures on a wider variety of collectibles, in an effort to show what else besides old comics, buyers are buying!

Original Art sales: Captain America #220 cover by Kane/Jansen $550; Marvel Team Up #10 cover by Romita Sr. $1000 cash, $1000 trade; New Gods #4 cover recreation by Colletta $300; Spawn of Frankenstein splash page (Phantom Stranger back-up) by Kaluta $350; Thor pencil sketch by Perez $85; A bunch of Captain Marvel interior pages by Starlin, prices ranging from$100 to $500.

Underground Comix sales: "Bring Me Your Love hardcover," signed by Charles Bukowski and Robert Crumb, NM $200; King Bee #1 Tabloid, Crumb cover, NM $45; Mickey Mouse Meets the Air-Pirates Funnies #1, VF+ $10; R. Crumb's Carload O' Comics, 1st print softcover, NM $50; R. Crumb Sketchbook 11/74 to 01/78 hardcover, NM $60; R. Crumb Sketchbook 11/83 to 04/87 hardcover, NM $45; "There's No Business" hardcover by C. Bukowski, illustrated by Crumb, NM $40.

Fanzine sales: Frazetta Memory Book NM $50; EC Fan Addict #3 VF $35; Captain George Presents #38/39 (Frazetta Special) NM- $55; Squa Tront #3, 5,6 VF+ as a set $55; Burroughs Bulletin #29 (Frazetta issue) NM $40.

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As usual, most of the books that sell on internet auctions generally sell under Guide or near Guide. Occasionally we get surprised by what a book brings.

A sample of my recent sales: Best of DC (Sugar & Spike digest) #41 VF $16.50; Binky's Buddies #4 FN $9, #5 FN $9., #6 FN $9, #7 VF $16, #8 VF $16, & #10 FN $9; Date With Debbi #7 VG $6, #11 NM $24; #12 FN $9,#17 (52 pager) VF $22.10; Debbi's Dates #4 (Neal Adams text illo) GD $46 (18x Guide!) & #7 NM $28; Homer the Happy Ghost (2nd series) #2 VF $22.75; Li'l Pals #2 FN $5.50 & #4 FN $5.50; Li'l Kids #1 FN $10.50, #3 VG $4.50, #6 VG $4.50, #10 FN $6.75, #11 FN $6.75, & #12 VG $4.50; Mad About Millie #6 VG $4.50; Mad About Millie Special #1 FN $5.25; Millie the Model #196 FN $4.50, #198 VG $3, #203 FN $4.50, 205 FN $4.50; My Love #22 FN $2.80 & 35 FN $2.80; Petey (Peter the Little Pest) #4 FN $7.50; Super DC Giant (House of Mystery) #S-20 FN $15.50; and Vampirella #19 (1973 Annual) GD $6.25.

Jim Lowery reports the following sales: All-Star Western #1 NM $70, #10 NM (1st Jonah Hex) $145; Amazing Spider-Man #120 NM $40; Amazing Adventures #9 NM $60 (6x Guide!); Batman #223 (Giant G-73) VF $49, #238 (DC 100 Page Super Spectacular #8 w/Adams cover) F $28 , NM $124 (3x Guide); Comic Book Marketplace #40 (Neal Adams) NM $32; #6 (Restoration Issue) NM $22; Conan #1 NM $276 (1.7x Guide); Debbi's Dates #1 F $16; Detective Comics #410 NM (Adams art) $31; House of Secrets #81 (first horror format) VF $30; Night Nurse #3 NM $46; Super DC Giant #S-17 (Love 1970) F $117,#S-19 (Jerry Lewis) NM $67; Wonder Woman #194 VF $33.75 (2.4x Guide), #200 NM $41.50; World's Finest #198 VF $41 & #199 VF $29.

Mark McDaniel reports the following sales: Adventure Comics #381 (1st Supergirl in series) VF $22.50; Beware #1 NM $12.25; Crypt of Shadows #1 NM $14.50; Dr. Weird #1 (early 1970s Jim Starlin fanzine) $52; Eagle #1 (early 1970s Jim Starlin fanzine/full page ad for Overstreet Guide #1 on back cover) $175; Eternals #1 (30 cent price variant) NM $12.50, #2 (30 cent price variant) NM $8; Fantastic Four #170 (30 cent price variant) NM $15.50, #171 (30 cent price variant) NM $15.50, & #173 (30 cent price variant) NM $19.50; Howard the Duck #3 (30 cent price variant) NM $10.50 & #4 (unlisted 30 cent price variant) VF $10.50; Legion of Super Heroes #1(1970s) VF $7; Midnight Tales #1 VF $9; Shazam #1(1970s) NM $9.50; SHIELD #1 NM $7; Space: 1999 #1 VF $9; Speed Racer #1 (1980s) NM $9.28; Supernatural Thrillers #1 NM $10; Tales of Suspense #18 FN $72; Teen Titans #1 (1960s) GD $36; Thor #248 (30 cent price variant) NM $10.50 & #250 (30 cent price variant) NM $15.50; War is Hell #1 NM $9; X-Men #54 (1960s) VF $46, #55 (1960s) VF $42, #56 (1960s) F $31, & #58 (1960s) NM $91.

Tom Raski reports the following sales: GI Combat #138 (intro the Losers in Haunted Tank) VF $25; Jerry Lewis #117 (Wonder Woman app.) VG $25; My Life #6 (1948) G $52; Nightmare #20 (Byrne art) NM $135, NM $136.00 (8x Guide); Windy & Willy #4 FN $15; Wonder Woman #200 VF $26.50 & #214 FN $30; World's Finest #204 (Wonder Woman team-up) VF $12.50; Young Love #111 (100 pager) VF $45; Young Romance #200 (100 pager)VF $50.

Stuart DeGraff reports the following sales: Adventure Comics #416 VF $35; Batman #134 VF $98.50; Batman #241 VF $16.50; Brave and Bold #90 NM $31; DC 100 Page Super Spectacular DC-6 (Adams cover) VF $107.50; Detective Comics #294 VF $90, #418 NM $53; Six Million Dollar Man #2 (magazine & Adams cover) NM $25; Superman Family #174, #177, #178 FN $24.50 for the group; Superman's Girl Friend Lois Lane #128 NM $13.70, #136 NM $10.50; Tomb of Dracula #10 (1st Blade) NM $20.50; Wonder Woman #177 VF $51, #190 VF $15.50, #194 VF $17.30, & #207 NM $18.55; Worlds Finest #206 NM $41, #221 NM $9.99, #231 NM $11.50, #227 NM $27.

SHAY SHETH - CONTINENTAL COMICS

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The last three months of 1998 were very strong with sales of over 200 pre-1955 comics. With the exception of Disney, MLJ and Quality, all Golden Age publishers are selling well. Most of our sales items are low grade GA books, FN and under, and the market is solid on these around Guide (slightly above Guide for under-priced publishers like Nedor).

Pre-Code horror and esoteric are also strong and continue to sell above Guide. Books with nice covers and/or interior art (such as Seven Seas #6 and Thrilling Crime Cases #49) sometimes sell for 2-3x Guide on low-priced examples. Lesser known titles like Scream, Tessie the Typist, and various other esoteric/ romance titles are starting to pick up. The Gerber Photo-Journal has allowed collectors to see what different covers appeal to their particular collecting tastes, thus fueling some of the enthusiasm for previously undiscovered titles.

Since our current collector base is mainly GA-oriented, we haven't advertised much Silver Age stuff lately. We plan to expand on Silver/Bronze this year in hopes of a long-awaited resurgence of such interest.

Recent sales: Action #33 FN- $275; Adventure #146 VG+ $55; Airboy V4/#4 G/VG $37; All Star #36 GD/GD+ $195; Amazing Man #14 GD$70; Amazing Mystery Funnies V2/#6 FA $60; Batman #101 VG+ $60; Brenda Starr [Superior] #10 GD+ $45; Chamber of Chills #2 VG+ $150; Clue Comics #4 VG $60; Comic Cavalcade #9 FA $60; Detective #44 GD $130; Detective #93 GD/VG $100; Dick Cole #4 VG- $14; Dick Cole #6 FN+ $33; Exciting #31 VG/FN $115; Fantastic Fears #39 VF- $105; Frisky Animals #54 VG/FN $30; Funnyman #2 FA/GD $16; Funnyman #3 GD $25.

Haunted Thrills #4 VF $140; Jungle #113 VG- $15; Jungle #122 VG- $14; Marvel Mystery #36 GD $130; Marvel Tales #120 GD/VG $30; Marvel Tales #123 FA/GD $11; Master #114 GD $8; Millie the Model #2 GD/VG $45; Modern Love #5 GD/VG $75; My Great Love #1 VG+ $35; My Love Story #1 FN/FN- $40; My Secret Marriage #7,#12 FN/VF @ $30; Out of the Night #13 GD+ $13, #15 VG $23; Perfect Crime #17 VG+ $20, #22 FN- $18, #33 VG+ 13.

Romantic Marriage #24 GD/VG $19; Scream Comics (40s) #5 VG $13; Showgirls #1 GD/VG $15; Space Thrillers (Avon Giant) #1 VG $160; Star Comics V1#8 VG- (Mile High copy) $175; Strange Adventures #76 VG $17; Terrors of the Jungle #17 (1) VF- $185; Tessie the Typist #13 GD/VG $19; Thrilling Crime Cases #46 VG- $21; Tomb of Terror #2 GD/VG $35, #4 GD $25; True Crime V1/#5 GD $45; Weird Mysteries #4 PR/FA $150; X-Men #2 GD+ $105; Zago #4 GD/VG $55.

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In general, I'm seeing movement in the marketplace away from specialized collecting of genres (horror, covers, etc.) and into varied areas such as interior artists, story content, title runs, by certain years… and memorabilia. (The following sales do not reflect buyers' premiums and are winning bid values from my latest auctions.)

Golden Age has only one problem and that is the lack of available acquisitions in all grades to meet the demand for reasonably priced books. I think one reason Golden Age is not the current "golden boy" of the hobby is that not all GA books are worthy of the asking price. I can spend my money more wisely in more attractive, lesser-priced items like eso-

THE MATT SCHIFFMAN REPORT

The On-Line Future?

Collectors were flush with catalogues back in December of 1977. This year the catalogues were few as dealers began going on-line. Ebay, E-Hammer, and smaller services offer access to a whole new group and constitute a genuine comic market revolution.

Golden Age

The defects that drop a book down to GD are many… and we all tolerate different defects. Even so, stronger GD prices for Golden Age Timelys, DCs, Fawcetts, and MLJs are being reported.

Recent sales: Detective #122 FR $120, #41 GD $295; Famous Funnies #32 FR $90; Flame #1 GD $245; Headline #2 FN $78; Hello Pal #1 GD $85; Jumbo #2 FR $250; Jungle #20 FN $160; Leading #1 VG $540; National #16 FN/FN- $210; Pep #22 FR $475, #26 FN $395; Rangers #1 GD/VG $240; Real Heroes #6 VG $40; Science #3 VG $280; Sub-Mariner #12 FN $360.

Atomic Age

If they can be found, they can sell! Even normally slow-moving Westerns are moving on-line. The Atom Era is supported more than comic collectors, as fan clubs for nearly every TV show, personality, or genre abound. $210 for a Gene Autry cap gun makes $35 for a comic look like a bargain. An entire new on-line world has opened up for many slow books.

Recent sales: Adv. Bob Hope #1 GD $140; Atomic Mouse #12 VF+ $35; Canteen Kate #2 FN $160; Cowboy Western #46 VF $75; Eerie #3 VG/FN $210; GI Combat #1 VG/FN $150; Krazy Kat #1 VF/NM $225; Lawbreakers Suspense Stories #12 VF $110; Lovers' Lane #32 VF $38; Namora #1 GD $200 Swift Arrow #1 VF $150; Popular Teen Agers #5 FN $105; Romance Trail #2 FN $100; Tegra #1 FN $180.

Silver Age

Mid to high grade Silver, once thought slow over the past four years, is now moving again. Lower grade is finding a home among a growing legion of readers, and the Dells and Four Colors are moving well on the internet. Marvel high grade is back… collectors know that a true NM- or better is still really tough (impossible?).

Recent sales: 80 pg Giant #8 VF/VF+ $250; Attack! #2 VF $15; Brave & Bold #87 NM- $35, #89 NM- $38; FF #58 NM- $80, #88 VF/NM $40; Flash #106 VF $1,100; Green Lantern #25 NM- $160; H-B Super TV Heroes #1 FN $55; Hawkman #2 NM $250; JLA #55 VF/NM $75; Our Army at War #81 GD $195, #83 GD $180; Superman #128 VF/NM $260.

Bronze Age

Bronze Age market sources reveal that House of Secrets, House of Mystery, Westerns, and Horror are the flavor of the month. Many of these books were relegated to the bargain bins over the past 25 years, and many collectors know just how tough these books are to find in grade. The 48 and 52 pagers continue to lead the way, while some collectors are beginning to talk about Charltons, Gold Keys, and smaller publishers. Skywald books in grade are difficult to find, but demand is yet to reveal itself.

Recent sales: Bizarre Adventures #28 VF/NM $22; Ghosts #1 NM- $85; Green Lantern #89 VF $15; HOM #94 NM- $18, #99 MT $28; HOS #198 VF/NM $20, #200 NM $22; Human Torch #1 NM $11; Incredible Hulk #141 NM $25; Inhumans #1 VF/NM $16; JLA #92 VF/NM $23; Laurel & Hardy #1 FN $30; Marvel Spotlight #2 GD $18; Night Nurse #2 VF $65; Our Army at War #242 VF $24; Shazam #1 NM $17; Tarzan #207 VF/NM $22; Tarzan Family #60 NM $12; Tomb of Dracula #1 (mag) VF/NM $14; Unk. Soldier #205 NM $15.

It appears that everyone is focusing on more than one aspect of the market… collectors are looking across the entire board for many different items. Pulps are gaining interest by some comic collectors, as well as toys, comic collectibles, and comic magazines. A healthy glow has been cast upon the market and that bodes well for the market as we head into the spring conventions. ■

MARKET REPORTS

Continued from page 69

teric magazines and superhero fan club merchandise. These markets are still in their infancy, even though memorablia prices are skyrocketing. Check out the prices in relation to scarcity in grade!

Golden Age sales: All Star #56 VG- $156; Atomic #3 GD+ $50, #4 GD+ $61; Batman #24 VG $164; Black Hood #17 VG+ $99; Black Swan #1 VF $92; Capt. America #46 FN- $516; Complete #2 VG-$186; Daisy Handbook #2 VG+ $50; Mask #2 G- $121; More Fun #54 FR $388; Special Edition #1 FR/GD $400; Phantom Lady #20 F+ $334.

Atom Age sales: Atom Age is doing great. Campus Loves #1 GD+ $34; Hollywood Diary #1 FN+ $69; Pictorial Love Stories #1 VF+ $163; Space Action #3 VG $66; Space Western #44 GD- $45; Teen Age Romances #1 FN $182; Texan #8 NM $54.

Silver Age is selling well at Guide in true high grades and very well in mid and low grades when discounted properly. There is quite an abundance of this material, possibly much more than anyone thought. Are the boomers bailing out? High grades should hold up well and plateau for awhile, but low grades are a wildcard… especially to the holders.

Silver Age sales: Action #300 VF+ $102; Avengers #15 NM- $90, #18 NM- $75; Batman #156 VF+ $74, #171 VF+ $242, #181 VF+ $94; Detective #359 VF $73; Lois Lane #70 NM- $316.

I feel the Bronze Age (1970's) market has just about imploded on the 85% or so of the common books. I also think that the remaining 15% are the truly scarce and hard to find issues and the only ones warranting the astronomical rise in prices reported by Overstreet. It amazes me how the market is milked until the cow dies. I suggest jumping off these books and take a look at the fanzines. They have historical merit, early artist appearances, interviews, and nonreprinted historical research. But stay away from most mimeographed and regular fan publications, as these are just glorified selling lists or letter columns with no special insights or artistic merits.

Bronze Age sales: Batman #261 NM- $44; DC-6 VF- $100; DC-8 F+ $36; DC-15 NM- $22; DC Special #2 VF $21; Debbie #13,14 NM- $30@; Ghosts #1 NM- $79; GI Combat #144 FN $50, #145 VF- $50, #146 VF+ $50, #147 VF+ $50, #148 VF- $50, #149 VF- $20, #150 VF- $30, #151 F $50; Hulk #181 VF- $220; Homer #4 VF- $17; Soap Opera Love #1 NM $30; Vicky #3 VF $18; Wacky Races #1 VF- $17; Wonder Woman #200 NM- $30; X-Men #94 VF $229.

Fanzines sales: All Stars #1 NM- $22; All Dynamic #1 NM- $21; Alter Ego (w/orig. mailers) #7,8,9 NM- $28@; Fantasy Heroes #3 FN- $26; Comic Artist #3 FN $20; Golden Age #1 VG $19; Panelologist Vol. 2 #7/8 VF $18; Scream Door #1 VF- $18; Steranko: Graphic Narrative FN $181.

Undergrounds are breaking out momentarily, but I would stay away from most unless you are familiar with the complexities of their original printings and can distinguish a classic underground from just an adult independent, regardless of age.

Underground sales: Das Kampf (Bode) NM- $28; Exotica #2,3 NM- $16@; Fanata #1 NM- $40; Gas Lite Vol.2 #10 VG- $88; Gosh Wow #2 VF $40; Hot Stuff #2,8 NM- $17@.

Memorabilia sales: Conan Blacklight Poster "Barbarians" VG+ $194; Black Bolt Blacklight Poster F $321; DC Greeting Card Set '70's NM- $40; DC Book Covers NM- $30; Archie '68 Promo Sticker VF $15; Charlton Comics Promo Sticker NM- $12; FF Fireside Hardcover VF $250; Marvelmania #4 NM- $31, #5 VF- $38, #6 VF+ $44; Marvelmania Catalog #2 VG+ $40; Marvelmania Posters-Spiderman VG+ $344; Dr. Doom F+ $324; Hulk VG $62; Capt. America VF- $341; Silver Surfer VG- $250; FF VF $313; Marvelmania Artist Bios VG $146; Marvelmania J. Kirby Port. A VF $99; MSH Port. VF $161; Amazing World of DC Comics #1 VF $87; #3 NM- $34; #4 NM- $30; Sensation #1 Famous Firsts HC VF $142.

Original art is looking strong with nice sales all around. I would stay away from common pages because they are plentiful. Focus on well known classic artists' covers, splashes, and action scenes. A good area for fun and profit is early sketches and unpublished pieces by name artists. These are sometimes as scarce as published works and are often overlooked… and more enjoyable.

One last word… I think it would be prudent to be cautious (as the year progresses) as to how this hobby/industry will be impacted by the reaction and over-reaction to the Y2K mess before and after the year's end. This hobby/industry is based on luxury dollars, so be wise, have fun… but be safe.

Original Art sales: Neal Adams Batman head sketch $198; Daredevil #3 Pg. 23 $332; Firehair #11 Pg 23 $55; DeCarlo double pg Archie splash $99; Chan Full Color Conan pen/ink $105; Adams/Heath Savage Tales #10 pgs. 5,6 splash $598; Ramona Fradon Aquaman/lad Pen/ink $109; Kirby Animation pencil sketches $148 & $163; Funnyman #4 pg 28 $143; Steranko rough cover layout in color for Encyclopedia of CB Heroes $350; Steranko pen/ink Ad art for Hulk Marvel Medallion $1124.

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Demand for Captain America, Human Torch, and Marvel Mystery are still great. Pre-Code horror with bondage covers and sadistic themes are still top sellers for me. The demand for them is strong, the books to fill the demand is another story. Most of these books you cannot get without paying AT LEAST Guide, and, in many cases, over Guide… hence HIGH prices for resale. (These high prices are sometimes only $100 at triple Guide!)

With convention season getting ready to start I look forward to a steadier market. Everyone has settled in over the Price Guide corrections and I think this year will be a step in the right direction for comics of all genres.

Recent sales: Avengers #4 VG $250; Blonde Phantom #17 GD $60; Hulk #5 VG+ $225; Marvel Tales #100 GD $55; Spook #27 FN $65; Strange Mysteries #7 VG $35; X-Men #64 FN $8.

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Post-Christmas sales have been all right but not great. As always money is a bit tight at this time of year. The Easter holiday should bring in additional tourist dollars. Overall demand continues for key books and certain high grade material. We are all hoping that the new Overstreet Price Guide for 1999 continues to lower and fine tune comic prices. Sales in 1998 were stronger due to the decreased valuations and spreads of many Silver Age

comics. I'd like to see the same formula applied to the Golden Age books.

Silver Age: Reasonable sales for Silver Age books are realized if the books are priced at a realistic level. However, if your issues are overpriced or overgraded you will sit with them forever! Most pre-1970 sales still involve some degree of discount and I don't see that changing in the near future.

Recent sales: Amazing Spider-Man #1 GD $700; Batman #171 FN $150, Davy Crockett Dell Giant #1 VG $50; Fantastic Four #7 FN $200, X-Men #1 VG $600.

Golden Age: I feel this area of the hobby needs some work. Most Golden Age books do not sell at Guide here. This includes many DC and Fawcett titles. The price levels on many of these books need to be reduced to a more reasonable level. This will spark new collector interest and help bring back some of the long time collectors who have left the hobby. Non superheroes especially fall into this category. When was the last time you received full Guide for Dells or other funny animal books? We picked up a large collection of 1950's DC and sci-fi books recently. Thank God for attics!

Recent sales: Action #85 VG $75; Batman #28 GD $100, Human Torch #14 FN $350; Submariner #2 VG $750;Whiz #6 VG $250.

Original art and toys were very active this month. We purchased a large group of boxed Matchbox cars, animation art, three nice Frazetta pieces and a fine group of 1950's TV Guides. Interest continues for 1960's TV and comic related toys.

Non comic book sales: Baloo animation drawing $40; Batman1966 board game$50; Hanna Barbera Flintstones cel 1980s $50; Hulk model kit in box $250; TV Guide #1 VG $95.

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The market seems to be heating up in anticipation of the upcoming convention season. Timelys are still selling as fast as they come in. Early Golden Age from 1939-1942 always sells very quickly, especially if they are nice looking GD/VGs or VGs. Pre-Code Horror is still doing very well with lots of requests for books like Mr Mystery and Weird Mysteries. No surprises there.

The biggest surprise is a reprint title… Marvel Masterworks! There is a huge demand for these high quality hardcover books. Many collectors are saying to themselves "Why run around for three years looking for FF #11-20 buying through the mail and traveling to shows when I can just buy the Marvel Masterworks Volume and get them all together in a hardcover book that displays beautifully for a small fraction of the price?" Expect to see these to continue to be very popular with lots of collector demand. They reprint Spidey #1-50, FF #1-50, JIM #83-110, Hulk #1-6, Avengers #1-30, Silver Surfer #1-18, X-Men #1-20, #94-120 GS #1, DD #1-11, TOS #39-50, #59-81, and Strange Tales #110-141 in 27 volumes. Some of these volumes are very scarce (#12-22) while others (#1-4, 9, 11) are absurdly common.

Sales include: Adventures into Terror #43 (#1) FN/VF $210; Boy #3 appGD $250; Fantastic #3 GD $1,000; Four Color #5 GD/VG $85; GI Combat #68 VG $100; Mystic #3 GD/VG (LR)$300; Science #7 FN- $200; Secrets of Haunted House #1 NM/MT $20; Unseen #7 VG $60; Web of Evil #4 FN/VF $95; X-Men #34 NM $65; Young Men #24 VG- $750.

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In today's market, an increasing percentage of our sales comes from toys, cards, original art, autographs, sports and rock memorabilia, Underground comix and magazines. As I enter my twenty-first year as retailer, I'm pleased to report that here, there's nary a speculator in sight. Many of our customers are completists who are filling in affordable copies in their incomplete runs. I'm seeing lots of fans and readers again, and that's encouraging!

Silver Age sales have been slow for the DC titles but decent for most Marvels. Mid-grade DC books gather dust here, while sales of average condition Marvels are uneven but they do sell as a result of the Guide's new spread adjustments. Amazing Spider-Man and Fantastic Four are at the top of the pyramid followed by X-Men and Avengers.

Esoteric and just plain weird and oddball books sell well if under the $20 threshold, especially Warrens and MADs.

Recent sales: Daredevil #38 VG $8, #46 F $6; Fantastic Four #68 FN $10, #71 FN- $7; Flash Gordon (Harvey) #1 GD $25; Forbidden Worlds #130 FN- $6; Four Color #208 (Brer Rabbit Does it Again) GD- $10, #620 (Mowgli Jungle Boy) VG $6, #782 (Duck Album) GD $4, Incredible Science Fiction #32 GD $45; Rock and Rollo #17 (Magic Lightning Collection) FN $10; Son of Vulcan #49 VG+ $5, #50 FN+ $8, #50 FN $5.

Undergrounds: Lean Years FN $2; Ninety-Nine Girls NM $2.50; Teen-Age Horizons of Shangrila (4th print) FN $4.

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Sales have been good if one responds to the realities of the current marketplace in a "collector friendly" environment. I continue to applaud (in most all cases) the lower prices as reflected in the 1998 Overstreet Price Guide. Sales are good in all genres besides superhero such as western, jungle, funny animal, horror, crime, sci fi, etc. with fairly priced material coupled with discounts for a small stack.

Marvel comics from the 1960s in average conditions, in the norm, are still priced too high and I feel they should see further reductions. I offer VG grade TOS, TTA, Strange Tales, etc at $3-5 a book and they tend to sit. They are very common.

It has been a very good year for comic book sales and I look forward to 1999 being even better as the market has definitely rebounded. Baker, L.B. Cole, and Schomburg continue to do well. Westerns are perennial good sellers for me, priced fairly (ie. somewhat below Guide). I cannot keep 1940's superhero in stock as they go out the door rather quickly.

Horror, crime sci fi genres have always done well for me provided you know what to look for. Undergrounds featuring Crumb, Shelton, Corbem Griffin, Bode, Sheridan, etc would show a lot of movement nationwide if they would only be listed in the Overstreet Price Guide. It makes no sense to me why they are not. Undergrounds are long overdue for finally being listed.

Platinum Age sales: Bringing Up Father #6 VG 1922 (C&L) $75; #9 VG+ 1925 (C&L) $100

I collect Plats, so I rarely have dupes, but when I do they tend to sell quickly.

Golden Age sales: All Top #10 FN (Fox jungle) $300; All Western Winners #3 VG+ $85; America's Greatest #7 VG $80; Capt Marvel #101 VG $35; Cindy #28 VG Kurtzman $17; Daredevil #27 VG bondage $65; Donald Duck Surprise Party 1948 (rare Kelly giveaway) FN+ $700; Flash Comics 1946 Wheaties Giveaway VG+ $300; Giant Edition #10 FN+ (scarce 128 page St. John Terrytoons) $200; Joker #25 FN- (Wolverton) $70; Jumbo #107, #113 VG+ (Baker) $30 ea; Kid Komics #8 VG+ $200; Nellie the Nurse #13 VF+ $45 #17 VG+ $25; Nyoka #7 VG+ $45, #31 VG- $10, #39 VG+ $20; Oscar #6 VG+ $20; Paul Terry's Comics #106 VG (scarce 100 pager) $35; Pep #66, #68 FN- $35 ea; Phantom Lady #13 VG (Baker) $500; Pioneer Picture Stories #6 FN- (war cover) $50; Punch and Judy V2 #2 $40; Punch #13 VG+ (horror) $150; Rusty #16 VG+ $35; Wonder Comics #13 VF $250 ,#14 FN $150, #15 FN+ $250 #16 FN $150; Young Romance #4 FN+ (S&K) $75 Ziggy Pig Silly Seal #6 FN+ $40 Zoot #11 $150, #14 FN+ $175.

Atom Age sales: All True Crime #47 FN+ $20; Adventures Into the Unknown #2 VG+ (horror) $150; Barnyard #26 VG+ $12 #29 FN+ Frazetta $20; Date With Judy #43, #46 VG+ $8 ea; Dick Tracy 3#3 VG+ $28; Exciting War #8 FN (Toth)$20; From Here To Insanity #8 VG $20; Giggle #87 VG $8; Goofy Comics #26 $10 #37 VG+ $12; Happy #35 VG+ $15 #38 VG+ $10; Jiggs & Maggie #11 VG $20; Katy Keene #23 VF $80; Jungle Action #6 VG $35; Murder Inc #9 VG+ $45; Murderous Gangsters #1 FN- (Wood) $100; Police #115 VG+ (Crandall) $40; Showgirls #1 VG+ (DeCarlo) $75; T-Man #6 VG $60, #14 VG $35, #34 VG+ $20 (Hitler covers); Uncanny Tales #9 VG $50; Underworld Crime #7 VG (hot poker cover) $75; Wacky Duck #3 VG+ $35; Wartime Romances #2 VG+ (Baker) $45.

Western sales: Bob Steele #9 VG- $20; Buck Jones 4C #733 VG $8 #6 FN+ $19 #7 VG+ $10; Gabby Hayes #15 FN- $20; Gene Autry #4 VF Fawcett $300 #3 Dell VG $35 #93 VF+ $15; Johnny Mack Brown 4C #584 VF $15; Monte Hale #43, #46 VG- $15 ea, #47 VG $19; Rocky Lane #10 VG- $20, #18 GD/VG $10, #24 VG $15, 43 VG $15; Rod Cameron #15 FN- $25; Spunky the Junior Cowboy #6 VG $10; Straight Arrow #1 VG $70, #36 FN+ $25; Tom Mix #4 VG $30, #6 ,#7, #12 GD+ $10 ea, #11 VG $20, #13 GD $7, #22,#29 ,#30 VG- $7, #42 VG $15; Western Thrillers #1 ('54) $30; Wyatt Earp #14 FN+ Atlas $18.

Silver Age sales: Avengers #6 VG+ $30, #16 VG+ $15, #57 FN $18, #100 FN+ $20; Conan #1 VG+ $35; Daredevil #1 FN+ $400; GI Combat #47 VG $45; Konga #3 FN $45, #5 VF $55 , #6 FN+ $40; Rex the Wonder Dog #22 VG $15; World's Finest #71 VG $150.

Bronze Age sales: Creeper #1 VG $15; Detective #400 NM (Adams) $50; Wonder Woman #178, #179 NM $30@.

Character Items: Dennis the Menace First Edition PBS In This Corner and Rides Again VF+ $20 ea; Green Hornet Cracks Down BLB FN+ $125; Lone Ranger Flashlight Ring 1946 $100; Little Orphan Annie Ovaltine Mug 1930s $75; Little Orphan Annie 1937 Manual & metal decoder in original mailing envelope $175; New York Mirror Sunday sections (6) 1954 sections $20 ea; Popeye 1935 Penny's pinback VF+ $35; Puck the Comic Weekly 1954 Sunday section $25.

The first comic: In December I picked up a couple of nice late '40's lots plus the earliest known American comic book issued as a supplement to BROTHER JONATHAN (New York, Sept. 14, 1842). It was a reprint of Rudolphe Töpffer's THE ADVENTURES OF OBADIAH OLDBUCK, 40 pages in length side stitched printed on both sides of the paper with 6 to 12 panels per page and measuring 8 1/2" x 11." What I turned up in Oakland, California confirms it is definitely a comic book.

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It seems that Mile High books are for sale everywhere… from the internet to conventions (or any size show). Many of them seem to have come out of hiding after Diamond Galleries began running ads looking to purchase them.

Low grade Golden Age comics sell well if priced reasonably. I have seen some new interest in low grade Silver Age recently, especially when it's priced below Guide. Some of these buyers are individuals who once owned a copy as a kid and seem to be repurchasing childhood treasures.

Another strong area of collecting is the market for toys and premiums. Star Wars is, as always, one of the real forces in this area of collecting (no pun intended)! Star Wars collectors are purchasing older and scarcer collectibles in high grade versus buying every new product on the shelf.

Golden Age sales: Batman #39 GD $91; Captain America #17 FR $150; Fight Comics #40 VG $63 (Nazi Bondage Cover); 48 Famous Americans VG $25; Mickey Mouse Magazine Vol. 3 #37 GD $45; Real Life Comics #3 FR $147.50 (Hitler Cover)

Silver Age sales: Amazing Spider-Man #5 VG $76; Avengers #2 VG $65, #3 VG $44 ; Fantastic Four #16 VG $26, #48 VG $75; Silver Surfer #4 VG $56; X-Men #7 VG $23

Bronze Age sales. Amazing Spider-Man #159 F $20 (varient cover); Famous First Edition C-30 hard cover F $50; Famous First Ed F-4 hard cover FN $50; Young Romance #197 VF $25.

Collector Books: Overstreet Comic Book Price Guide #1 (white cover) VG $405

Premiums: Captain Marvel merchandise sheet $20; Denny Kellogg Pep Pin $20

Toys: Return of the Jedi Leia Combat Poncho MOMC $25; Mego Kid FlashFigure Loose $160

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Golden Age books are selling well down here, and seem to be keeping their value. Books in the $100-$500 price range are hard to keep in stock, as they are fast sellers. Timely, DC, Fiction House, and MLJs are HOT. I have found that high end restored books move, if priced accordingly.

Golden Age sales: All Star Comics #1 appFN/VF (Heavy restoration) $1,000, #3 appVF/NM (Restored, with slight trim, and bone-white pages) $4,500; Detective Comics #31 appFN/VF (Restored) $3,800; All-American Comics #27 GD $350; All Flash #2 GD/GD+ $300, #4 GD/VG $150, #5 GD/VG $150, #7 VG/VG+ $175, #10 GD- $250; Adventure Comics #93 VG $160, #94 FN- $230; Four Color #29 (DD & Mummy's Ring) GD $400; Looney Tunes #2, 3, 5, 6 (all GD/VGs) $620.

Atom Age comics from the '50s are RED HOT, with obscure horror and crime books leading the way. Certain issues that we sell for multiples of Guide to other dealers, are in turn sold by them at multiples of Guide as well. Lower grade books tend to sell for higher multiples than their VF cousins. Other than this,

normal '50s DC and Atlas are selling well and there seems to be a lot of action in the scarce titles of small press companies.

Atom Age sales: Flying Saucers VG $150; MAD #1 FR/GD $300; Thing #10 VG $170, #16 NM $320, #4 FN/VF $250; Vic Torry & His Flying Saucer VG $125; Weird Science Fantasy #29 GD- $70.

Silver Age Marvels are starting to sell at lower grades, with new price adjustment, as are DCs. This Silver Age market is unstable at best due to large amounts of these books hitting ebay and other online auctioning sites. It's nice to see the product moving, but not at lower prices than was had ten years ago. I believe ebay, and similar sites are good for the collector, as the middleman, the dealer is removed from the equation. From the dealer's point of view, I can say that the whole thing makes it difficult on many levels. Most importantly, it makes pricing a much harder task. The Guide value versus the online auctioning value tend to differ greatly at times. I see that this will indeed redefine the market very soon. Dealers and comic shops that are not on the internet and are not participating in online auctioning may be dealt a fatal blow. As a hobby, this will require big changes to survive.

Silver Age sales: Amazing Spider-Man #54 $10; Avengers #5 $11.25; Daredevil #8 $52.50; Showcase #33 $75, #36 VG/F $70.

Bronze Age books sell well, but basically I see the same trend with the introduction of online auctioning. Books that were at one time scarce have flooded the marketplace via auction sites, and have thereby reduced their asking price.

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I rushed out to buy The Guide #2 and was generally disappointed because practically none of the hottest Bronze Age comics were listed. I think the point of an "Update" is to list the most noteworthy changes in the market since the release of the Annual. In my opinion, this did not happen.

The good news for collectors is that they now have until April to buy up the books they need before there is a price increase. However, it might already be too late, as oddball and scarce 1970's books have been selling for as high as 15 x Guide in low grade!!!

Bronze DC titles are scarcer than Bronze Marvels. Bronze Charlton is starting to build a following but is still far behind. Record prices are being paid for the rarest Bronze books from all 3 publishers since they are ONLY found in low grade! Any books VF or better are true rarities.

Recent sales of superhero titles reflect a close adherence to Guide while the non-superhero books generally sell above Guide.

Sales for the main 1970's fanzines are hot and are being sought out by collectors! Foom and Amazing World of DC lead the way in demand. There's a meeting place on the internet to buy/sell/trade these fanzines plus back issues of CBM and Overstreet Price Guides at www.dlcwest.com/~comicsape /gemstone.htm.

Recent sales: Battle Classics #1 NM- $6; Debbi's Dates #4 FR $2; Jonah Hex # NM- $12; Perry Mason Mystery Magazine #1 GD $10; Scooby Doo (Marvel) #1 NM- $13; Superboy #68 FR $25; Superboy & Legion of Super Heroes #197 VF $10; Superboy #202 FN $12 Superboy #205 VG $7; Super Friends #1 NM- $32; Super Heroes Battle Super Gorillas #1 VF+ $7; Three Mouseketeers #4 VG $14, #7 GD+

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Toys, comic books, and original art were featured in our January 30th, 1999 auction. As demonstrated by the sample sales figures below (which include the buyer's premium), collectors are buying one-of-a-kind original art and high grade items. Also, many comic book collectors have recently begun to look at original art and memorabilia as a way to diversify their four color portfolios.

Original Art

Amazing Spider-Man #21 Page 10 (Ditko-1964) Ditko brush work highlights Spidey and the Beetle in every panel. Pen and ink, Excellent $3,630.

Amazing Spider-Man #21 Page 11 (Ditko-1964) Features Human Torch. Pen and ink, Excellent $1,650.

Daredevil #103 cover art (J.Romita-1973) Spectacular cover featuring Spider-Man and Daredevil. Pen and ink, Very Fine $1,870.

Fantastic Four #20-Splash Page (Kirby/Ayers-1963) "The Mysterious Molecule Man." Pen and Ink $7,480.

Justice League of America #1 (Sekowsky-1960) Splash page of the fourth story of JLA #1, featuring Batman and J'onn Jonz on the verge of another battle. Pen and ink, Excellent $2,750.

Tarzan #216 cover art (Kubert-1973) Kubert Tarzan art is difficult to obtain as virtually all art was returned to Burroughs estate. Pen and ink, Excellent $2,200.

Vault of Horror #16 (Craig-1950) "Werewolf Concerto" Complete 8-page story. Pen and Ink, Very Fine $1,210.

Walt Disney's Comics and Stories #308 (Barks-1966) Complete 10-page story entitled "The Beauty Business." One of two complete Barks Donald stories known to exist. Excellent $57,200.

"A Gentleman's Gentleman" (Porter-1941) Mickey and Pluto star in the Good Housekeeping Magazine feature. Watercolor and ink, matted and framed, Excellent $6,930.

"Pluto the Racer" (Gottfredson-1978). Watercolor on board, framed and signed, Excellent $13,200.

Comic Books

Adventure #247 NM $5,500 (1.31x Guide)
All-American #79 NM92 $577.50 (1.1x Guide)
All Star #36 FN72 $770 (1.05x Guide)
Black Cat Comics #1 VF- $385 (1.29x Guide)
Kid Komics #4 VF77 $484
Showcase #24 VF+/NM- (Bethlehem) $2,145 (1.99x Guide)

Memorabilia

Mickey Mouse Book (Bibo & Lang- 930) First appearance of Mickey Mouse and Minnie Mouse in the first Disney book and licensed Disney item. VF $6,600.

Superman Tank (Linemar Co.-1950s) Mint in box $3,960.

Superman Sirocco Statuette (1942) One of two copies known to exist without ankle damage. Excellent condition $4,785.

$12; Time Warp #1 VF+ $6; Treasure Chest V#20 #20 VG+ $10; Unknown Soldier #205 VF $12; Weird Western Tales #12 F+ $20, #14 NM- $28, #16 VF- $12, #17 VF- $12, #18 FN $10, #19 VF $12, #20 VF- $12; Wonder Woman #179 FN- $16.

CLIFF WIENER & KEN DAHKER

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Before the holiday we sold a large number of books including some nice pre-Code horror and crime comics. The pre-Code market remains very solid although the demand is not what it was in early 1998. The collector base for these titles hasn't grown and as people get the issues they want there isn't a need for these collectors to continue to collect issues they already have.

Most asked question in '98... "Do you have a Punch #12?" We sold three copies of this book in '98 and demand continues to grow. Watch out for the other key Cheslers... including Punch #9, Dynamic #8 and #11. Demand for these issues are really strong!

As for mainline Golden Age titles there seems to be a limit to collectors' interest in most comics for only the first 20 issues or so of a given title. Does anyone want a ugly issue of Flash, with Noddy, Winky and Blinky on the cover? I know I don't... and our sales reflect that as well!

So when we don't sell it, what do we do with it? Put it on ebay! We have sold several items that were previously on our website for more money on ebay than we had them listed for on the site. Seems to be plenty of books for everyone on ebay. Conventions are still the backbone of our hobby, but it seems to us that the really good buyers only come out to Chicago and San Diego. When we set up at a show and only sell a few things it makes it difficult to come back to that show... and I'm not the only dealer who says that!

Some dealers we've spoken with are not going to attend the same shows as last year because (they say) the sales weren't there to justfy a return trip. It's our hope that collectors will come out to local conventions and meet and build relationships with the dealers... or else they're going to end up with more animé dealers at shows and less Golden Age and Silver Age dealers.

Recent sales: Horrific #3 FN+ $600; Marvel Comics #9 AppFN $3500; Punch #12 GD/VG $1000; Thrilling Crime #49 NM $775; Weird Chills #3 FN+ $250; Weird Mysteries #11 FR/GD $165; Witchcraft #5 FR+ $130.

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Demand for high grade Silver Age is strong, with NM issues frequently commanding prices above Guide. Silver Age key issues sell well at Guide and demand is starting to exceed supply for some issues. Common low-grade Silver Age issues continue to be the dogs of the comic book market. High grade key Bronze Age issues sell extremely well and it is hard to keep up with the demand for NM issues of Hulk #181 and X-Men #94.

As usual, high grade Golden Age issues sell extremely well and Golden Age in all grades sell reasonably well around Guide price. Pre-Code horror is always in demand and so are esoteric Golden Age issues with provocative covers. If priced in accordance with Guide, Timely's sell well in all grades.

Timely sales: All Select #6 FN/FN+ $350; Captain America Comics #17 CF detached otherwise VF $550, #19 FN- (restored) $600, #74 GD $525; Marvel Comics #1 VF (restored) $12,500.

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DC sales: All Star Comics #22 NM (Rockford) $2550; Batman #2 VG/VG+ $1850, #7 GD $350, #14 GD $240, #16 GD $435, #232 NM+ $150; Boy Commandos #1 GD/VG $600; Detective Comics #19 FN+ (restored) $1,075; Green Lantern #40 NM $395, NY World's Fair 1940 VG/FN $1500; World's Finest #25 FN $200.

Miscellaneous Golden Age sales: Brenda Starr #14 FN+ $400; Dell Giant Christmas Parade #1 FN/VF $230; Dick Tracy #1 FN $107; Exciting Comics #58 VF/NM $600; Fantoman #4 VF+ $785; Forbidden Worlds #2 VF+ (Bethlehem) $900; Four Color Comics #108 (Donald Duck) FN/VF $550, #159 FN/VF $320; Out of the Shadows #5 (#1) NM $430; Pep #22 VG- (amateur restoration) $1500, #34 VG+ $385; Phantom Lady #15 VF/VF+ $1275; Scribbly Lot #6, #8, #9, #11 VG, #7 GD+ $270; Terrific Comics #5 VG $2200; Thrilling Comics #70 VF/NM $450.

Marvel Silver Age sales: Daredevil #1 VF $920, #3 VF++ $225; Fantastic Four #1 VG+ $1,750; Hulk #3 NM- $1350, #102 NM $145, #181 NM/NM+ $500; Iron Man #1 NM (white pages) $400, Silver Surfer #1 VF/NM $300; Spider-Man #14 VF/NM $1300, 17 VF $225, 28 VF $200; X-Men #1 FN $1100, #1 FN $1000, #1 VG $650, #1 VG $750, #2 VF/NM $1250, #4 NM $1,000, #5 NM- $575, #10 VF/NM $225.

Marvel Bronze Age sales: Giant Size X-Men #1 NM- $350; Hulk #181 NM+ $500.

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The comic reader still thrives in the marketplace. People continue to search out fair-good condition, complete, intact comic books for the sake of reading, filing away, and then re-reading again at another leisurely moment. With all the talk of high-end near mint plastic-encased books locked away in strong boxes or fire-proof vaults, I feel the purpose of the hobby is to still be able to look at and enjoy the contents of the books one purchases.

There does seem to be price-caps on low-end books, but collectors are searching out coverless books or incomplete comics (if the one story of their favorite character appears).

I'm starting to tire of looking at the back issue shelves and guessing what 1970's comics that currently sell for a couple of bucks or so will be the next "$20 in NM" trend of the year. Will it be the DC "dollar" comics, Star Comics from Marvel, or will someone re-discover the Pacific and Eclipse horror books, or those dam fine books published by First Comics? Does that mean that the price of a comic should be inflated once a comic title is rediscovered? The convention season begins. Space prices, number of dealers appearing, and audience numbers all go up. Never have I seen so much product available… but so little immediate capital by both parties—dealer/collector—available.

Recent sales: Action #203 GD+ $30; Adventure #94 GD+ $70; Amazing Fantasy #15 PR (non-story page missing) $250; Avengers #1 PR/FR $75, #4 GVG $220; Brave & Bold #16 GD $45; Captain Marvel #51 FN $75,#55 GD/VG $35; Daisy Handbook #2 VG/FN $50; Daredevil #1 GD/VG $270; Detective #84 VG $150; Fantastic Four #1 PR/FR $300; #2 FR/GD, 3 FR/GD $175@, #4 GD/VG $400, #6 FR/GD $90, 1#2 GD/VG $110, #28 FN/VF $100, #8 FN/VF $480; Flash #52 VG/FN$150; Incredible Hulk #4 FR-/GD $150, #6 FR-GD $90; Is This Tomorrow VF/NM $65; Journey Into Mystery #83 PR $140; March of Comics #125 VG/FN $40; Mary Marvel #2 GD/VG $90; Showcase #55 VG/FN $60; Superman #68 GD $50; Tomahawk #1 FR $50; Whiz #128 #VG/FN $40.

Collectors should note that the opinions expressed in CBM Market Reports are solely those of the individual dealers and collectors who contribute them. Seasoned hobbyists are acutely aware that prices vary based on geographic location, time of year, and a number of other marketplace factors.

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Please note that CBM is not responsible for incorrect addresses, phone numbers, or incorrect prices printed in Market Reports/MarketWatch.

Continued from page 9

looked far different from the specimen in my collection! The cover is a victim's-eye-view of being buried alive, but rather than a sinister looking man digging the grave, the dirty deed is done by a decomposing dead man! It makes for a much more satisfying cover than what was actually used.

One can surmise that the ongoing Senate hearings and the impending Comics Code were to blame for desecrating this fine cover. Witches Tales #27 ended up reprinting issue #6 (November 1951) which contained the story "The Thing That Grew." Where does that leave "Dig That Grave"? I can find no story by that title in any of the Harvey horror titles in my collection, so not only did we lose a fine cover, but perhaps a good story—or four!

We also found a smaller version of the rotting corpse cover, to be used in as an in-house advertisement, which makes me wonder… at what point did Harvey decide to tone down the cover and go with a reprint?

When the dealer mentioned that the end-of-show special for these items was six for $10, my daughter had to hold me up and keep assuring me that I was awake!

I believe the original cover is by the great Lee Elias, but the replacement head doesn't look like his work to me. At any rate, the people in charge of the censoring really dropped the ball. Far more disturbing than the face of the rotting corpse are the victim's cracked and dirty fingernails! Yeech! Get a manicure!

Mike Howlett, Massachusetts

A little ignored and ticked

Hello Gary and hello to all the contributors at CBM. Just wanted to give you a little praise (before I lay in with the criticisms). I loved CBM #65! And I just finished reading #64. My comic shop sold out of it, and I had to order a back issue from you folks. I appreciate how quickly you got it out to me by the way.

Now to my complaint. I just finished reading your X-Men issue and I thought it was wonderful. However, I have this problem. While on the one hand I am a rabid fan of your mag, I am also a longtime Marvel and Timely fan as well. At times, the two are at odds. I passionately savor all issues you do on Marvel/Timely books. But after reading each of those issues, I realize how few and far between they are.

Issue #64 just sort of drove the point home to me when I saw the cover gallery. Five pages of Doom Patrol, two pages of metal men, and one page of X-Men. Seven to one.

Since I never really did a lot of DC collecting, I have enjoyed your articles and have had fun learning a lot of wonderful things about DC. However, as a Marvel/Timely fan, I can't help but feel a little ignored and ticked at how little attention you give them. I started collecting CBM with #24, the Spider-Man issue and was sold instantly and have loved every issue since. But there are so many great Marvel comics out there and you really should pay them more attention.

How about a article on the Human Torch/Sub-Mariner battle issues? How about an article on the Avengers and Captain Marvel? How about the amazing continuity in Marvel comics, a trait that only Marvel had during the Silver and Bronze Age of comics. How about some of the great Bronze Age writer/artists, guys like Jim Starlin, Ross Andru and others. There is so much rich terrain that hasn't been touched and after all the DC articles you have done, it's time for more Marvel. OK, I'm done ranting. Again, I love your mag and I appreciate the fact that you actually DO listen to your readers and care what they think. Take care and thanks for your time.

Grant Watson, California

Your criticism is well taken, and hits on a point I struggle with each month as I plan the contents of upcoming issues. It's no secret that CBM (like every fanzine before it) is run on a very strict budget and, as such, I make very few article assignments. Instead, I ask fellow collectors and enthusiasts to write about what they like and what they would like to share with fandom. This means the mix can be less than balanced on occasion… and this is further compounded by space and graphic considerations.

My decision to go light on the X-Men color covers (and heavy on the Metal Men and Doom Patrol) was based on the fact that every Marvel cover is reproduced in Gerber, Vol III and IV… not the case with Metal Men and Doom Patrol in Gerber Vol I and II. I was trying to experiment with the idea of showing a whole run that you couldn't see in Gerber. (I also realize not every CBM reader has the Gerber books, but about half do… and this fact does influence what I select for CBM's color gallery).

But in spite of my "noble" motives, I apparently disappointed you, and for that I apologize. I'll redouble my efforts to include more Marvel related material in future issues. To prove it, I'm already planning to use articles on Ironman, Subby, Tales Of Suspense, and other Marvel topics as we speak (or… ah… write). Thanks for corresponding, Grant, and you're absolutely right… I DO listen to readers and I DO care what they think!

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Mixed emotions?

Must admit that I had mixed emotions when I received my CBM #65 in the mail. Since I am strictly a collector of crime comics, I was glad to see the genre finally getting some much-deserved attention. On the other hand, these books are hard enough to find as it is (and often at reasonable prices—imagine that!)… did you have to let the whole world in on it?!

Richard Wolfe, via E-mail

Web woes

Was browsing your website and spotted an error… at the first reference to <TABLE-BORDER HEIGHT> and <TD HEIGHT> the height is way too big so that it looks as if the excellent article on Reed Crandall doesn't load! I realized after looking at your source that it had all loaded but I needed to scroll! That Cryptkeeper sure wants to spoil my fun!

I've loved reading your mag for ages, but as every issue contains an "I have loved reading your mag" letter, I hadn't written. However, now I've finally joined the adoring masses can I say…… no! I've said it already. Best wishes,

Norman Boyd, via E-mail

Put a perspective on it

There was a letter in CBM #64 from Jeff Campbell with which I can relate. For years now, I have had the same feelings and thoughts in the back of my mind. There were specific times when something happened to show me (in no uncertain terms) that comic books and fandom were changing. There are so many parallels with his story and mine. I started reading and collecting in 1973 and I majored in English as well. I loved comics just like he did. With a passion only other comic fanatics could understand.

I agree with Mr. Campbell that comics have gone commercial. Charlie Brown just thought the world and Christmas was commercialized in 1965! He would be in shock if he were to see our society in the '90s. The excesses of the '80s and the speculation of the '90s have made this a brave new world indeed.

And I'm still like Mr. Campbell, too. Because I still love comics! I choose to view comics as a place of wonder and a place where a person's imagination can take flight.

It's just that, for me, things have come to a crossroads recently... and his letter was the first thing that put a perspective on it. I began to notice my feelings about comics more. And then, something happened that I could have never predicted. Yes, Mr. Campbell, I suspect we both are getting old and may be that's not such a bad thing! Sometimes, you get an epiphany when you least expect it.

For the last six months, I have lost interest in comic books. No, not all interest but keen interest. I haven't cared if Amazing Fantasy #15 rose in value or what Wolverine was doing this month. I couldn't care less about Golden Age books. (I've never had a history with them but they are the beginnings of our industry/hobby, so I've kept watch over the years.)

But something happened to me and I lost touch. I stopped making special trips to comic shops to find missing back issues. I cut back on the number of titles I read. And I'm ashamed to admit it, but I've skimmed over an occasional current issue because I simply didn't care. Somewhere during this time, I read Mr. Campbell's letter.

And the strangest part was I didn't notice any of this was happening until I got the solution for it! It was simple. (Aren't most answers?!) I have moved into a new phase of my life (new marriage and stepchildren, pregnancy) and comic books were put on the back burner.

But then, I had a talk with my editor, Dave Huber, of Advanced Iron, the fanzine for the character, Iron Man. Now, Dave had no idea this was happening (and I was only realizing it during the call). We usually talk about deadlines and the number of pages my column is. But somehow, we started talking about collecting. And not just any comic book, but my favorite, Iron Man! He was telling me about how he had found some old back issues he was wanting. As he was talking, a spark flashed in my psyche. All the memories of the excitement of completing my Iron Man collection came roaring back. I could actually feel a smile on my face as we talked! All the disappointment and great finds; all the great stories and artwork, and the feeling when I got that last back issue were there just like it had happened during the past week.

I guess it was there all along but buried under tons of life stuff. Mr. Huber provided a way for it to come alive again. I'm not at the level of interest I was at 13 but I have a renewed interest in collecting and reading comic books again. I'm going to the comic shops. I'm looking for Tales

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of Suspense issues I don't have. I've even looked for back issues of reprint mags if you can believe that! I can't wait for the next issues of my favorite titles. (And I realize I haven't felt this way in a long time.)

I'm putting my hobby in perspective with my other life stuff. But it's fun again to collect and read the adventures of my four colored heroes. And for that, Dave, I will be eternally grateful. And to you, too, Jeff, for putting into words something that was in the back of my mind at least 10 years! I'm excited again!

Ye Editor of CBM ends his monthly column with a special wish for all collectors. He says "may you fill the holes on your want list." I have read it every month for almost five years and it has never meant anything to me personally… until now!

John Doe, via E-mail

Puzzling price variant

Received CBM #66 in the mail today. It was the first issue of my new subscription, so I was very impressed that it arrived at my home a couple days before I even could have picked it up at my local comic shop.

Just thought that I would mention that the Steve Ditko article which originally appeared in The Comics newsletter was recently updated and reprinted in Comic Book Artist #3. By the way, CBA is a great new publication from TwoMorrows, the same guys who put out the Jack Kirby Collector. It features tons of interviews and a few articles mostly centering on Bronze Age comics. I recommend it to any of you readers interested in that period.

Thanks for another great issue of CBM… I just wanted to let you know that I really enjoyed the recent article about cover price variants. While, I don't collect Marvels, the indication that some of the suspected variants were actually Canadian editions shed some light on a mystery I have personally had for many years.

During the late 1980s, I subscribed to several DC Comics, among them Tales of the New Teen Titans. When I received issue #83, it had a grocery store price sticker covering up the price on the cover. When I removed the sticker, I found a price of $1.35. Now, I always found this exceptionally puzzling since issue #82 had a cover price of 75¢ and issue #84 had a cover price of $1. I always assumed that somehow the typesetter had made a mistake in the price increase and, instead of destroying the books, DC had just sent them to the subscribers. Now, it would appear that for some reason, DC just sent out Canadian newsstand editions to American subscribers ($1.35 is the Canadian price listed on issue #84). Thanks again for the great publication that you put together.

"John Jones," via E-mail

1st series CBMs

Have finally managed to acquire and look through those 1st series CBMs (selected issues between 1-21). I had very high expectations of these issues and was not disappointed. There are numerous excellent articles providing great insight and information about our hobby. Personal favourites would be the articles on the "Mile High Collection" in CBM #2-5 and the "Scarcity of Golden Age DC" in CBM #11-14, but to be honest there are so many highlights it is not practical to try and list them all. Hopefully you will find a way of reproducing this 1st series for those who missed them.

On the subject of reprints, I see you will shortly be producing a CBM Special Edition with articles originally presented in CBM #22-24. I have recently seen the three covers to be used on this and while nobody is likely to argue with Suspense #3 or Startling #49, I am a little surprised to find Dynamic #18 in such illustrious company. However, we all have different opinions on such matters which is perhaps part of the joy of this hobby!

In closing, I congratulate you on what continues to be a magazine of the highest quality. Long may it continue. Best Wishes,

John Smith, Essex, England

Brutal books

Went to the comic book store to pick up the latest MAD reprints and I also snagged the latest CBM, the pre-Code crime issue! Great theme! I have a couple of issues of Crime Does Not Pay, and an issue of Crime Exposed. Marvel went to great lengths to copy the format of Crime Does Not Pay, even the art style!

There's a story in Crime Does Not Pay about two hardened convicts who meet in prison and start making a list of everybody they plan to kill when they get out of prison. Upon release, they meet in a diner to plan their revenge and one of them expresses reluctance: Now that he's out of stir, he wants to have a nice meal, go to a movie, sleep in a nice bed, meet a girl… the other con starts a fight in the diner, a cop walks in to break it up and they kill him. They drive cross-country with their list and kill a bunch of people! (When I was first collecting comic books about 1975, my mother told me about some of the violence in the '50's comics of her childhood and how all the neighborhood children just ate it up!)

They are brutal books. I've always wondered just how 'true' these stories are. Are they somewhat factual or near-complete fabrications? Anyway, I don't really know much about them, so the CBM article was very informative to me.

Tony Seybert, California

Spicy artist

Your readers may want to know that the illustration of the bound woman receiving the forced transfusion (with the villain pumping the liquid) on page 3 and page 24 of CBM #65 was derived from the cover of Spicy Mystery (April 1938). I do not discern a signature, but it does not look like a Ward or Parkhurst, the usual Spicy cover artists. How did Nicky Wright come across that image? Was it used in an actual crime comic since its appearance in 1938, or was it drawn for this article?

Alfred Jan, California

My thanks to everyone who wrote in this time, I look forward to hearing comments and suggestions from CBM readers all over the world. You're all part of the "CBM family" now, and your opinion counts! I hope you'll write or FAX soon! Please note that CBM reserves the right to edit letters selected for publication for length and/or content. If you'd care to write, send communications to:

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Duck STAMPS

by Michael Naiman

Is philatelic fun... the missing link of comic book crossovers?

Some folks say that the urge to collect is part of man's genetic makeup. This primal impulse might evidence itself in various ways, but, with many kids of my generation, the introduction to "collecting mania" might have manifested itself in the inexpensive and (at that time) very popular hobby of stamp collecting.

It was 1960, and I remember riding my bicycle five tortuous hill-climbing miles to College Grove, the first regional shopping center in San Diego. My hard earned money was secured in the distinctive purple and gold Crown Royal bag, a cache of coins just waiting to be spent on a special item at the Walker Scott department store's stamp department. The overwhelming enthusiasm for stamps was so rabid that I even established a stamp collecting club at school! We met once a month in each other's home to swap stamps and gander at a globe to see where on earth these philatelic wonders had originated.

While stamps were our passion, there were always times during the meetings when we took a break and checked out the other guy's stack of well-read comic books. We all had them... stored in boxes or haphazardly thrown in the closet... attempting to hide them from our younger siblings. Back in those days I don't know if you'd call us "collectors"... we were more akin to "accumulators," gatherers of Dells and DCs, Sack Sacks and Superman, anything that might pique our ever curious imaginations.

Fast forward 38 years. It's a Sunday afternoon and I'm reading the local fishwrap. An ad catches my eye.... "SandiCal Stamp Show next weekend"... I think to myself... "What a great opportunity to relive those bygone days of stamp collecting, when collecting wasn't such 'serious business.'"

The day of the show arrives and I wandered the uncrowded aisles taking note of the snowy-haired men diligently examining the precious pieces of paper under their carefully controlled magnifying lens. Nowhere to be seen or heard was the exhilarating energy, mania, or noise levels that one experiences at a comic book convention. Here instead, was the relaxed, reverent and almost pious appreciation that characterizes today's aging stamp collector.

Then suddenly, like Capt. Marvel's "Bolt from the Blue" I saw them. I was in disbelief... there was a group of stamps whose illustrations looked shockingly familiar! On a table in front of me were stamp-sized replications of covers that have appeared on issues of *Walt Disney Comics and Stories*. Since Disney Ducks are the cornerstone of my collection. I thought "What a find!" For the exorbitant sum of $11, these mint-condition miniature-marvels were to be mine!

Stamps and Disney comics have been intertwined in my "collecting life" from the very

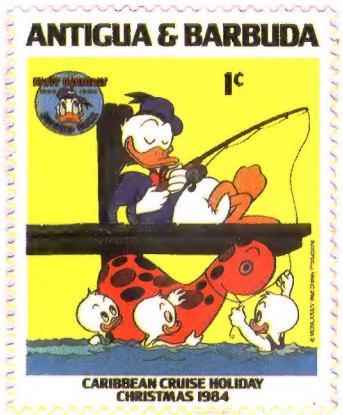
beginning. My primal memory of a comic book was *Walt Disney's Comics and Stories* #161 (February 1954)... and guess what was on the cover... Donald examining his stamp collection! I'm convinced that the visual seed of Donald and his stamps must have taken root in my young and fertile brain, waiting to blossom a few years later.

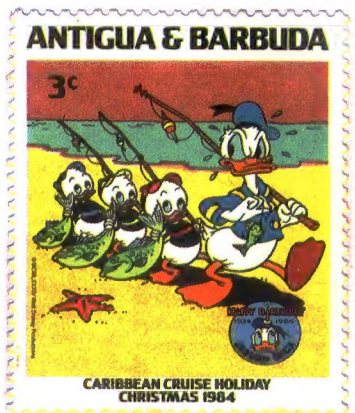
With the help of Bruce Hamilton's *Carl Barks Library*, I was able to identify and match the stamps with their *Comics and Stories* cover counterparts. Interestingly, some of the stamps are colored differently than the comics, but the images are identical. The stamps were originally issued during the Christmas season of 1984, by the island nation of Antigua and Barbuda, the exception being the 1989 reproduction of *WDC&S* #161.

Another twist in this Disney stamp and comic book crossover odyssey can be found in one of my favorite Barks tales from *Four Color* #422 (September/October 1952) entitled "Donald Duck and the Gilded Man." The opening splash panel finds Donald pouring over his stamp collection while he attempts to evaluate its worth... and yes, he does have a price guide within arm's reach! As he states, "Stamp collecting is big time business!" Donald and the nephews soon begin a search for the world for the famous "1¢ British Guinea Magenta." (The British Guinea Magenta is a real stamp worth, at that time, $50,000! If this stamp came to market in 1999, it would fetch in excess of $1,000,000!) Leave it to the great Carl Barks to do his homework and incorporate authentic stamps and geographic locations in this fanciful adventure. Even at the tender age of 10, I could see from the story that the acquisition of paper collectibles can be more than just a hobby... a concept that I carry with me to this day!

As Donald predicted, not only did stamps become "big time business" during the ensuing years, comic book collecting did too! Yet with all the high-price hoopla, there is still plenty of inexpensive fun to be found looking for and purchasing collectible crossover items. Along with comics... toys, premiums, and memorabilia can provide the "missing link" to our youthful pasts.

The "hunter-gatherer" chromosome needs very little stimulation to trigger the excitement and enthusiasm that drives us to collecting. And sometimes all it takes is a stamp collecting duck!





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